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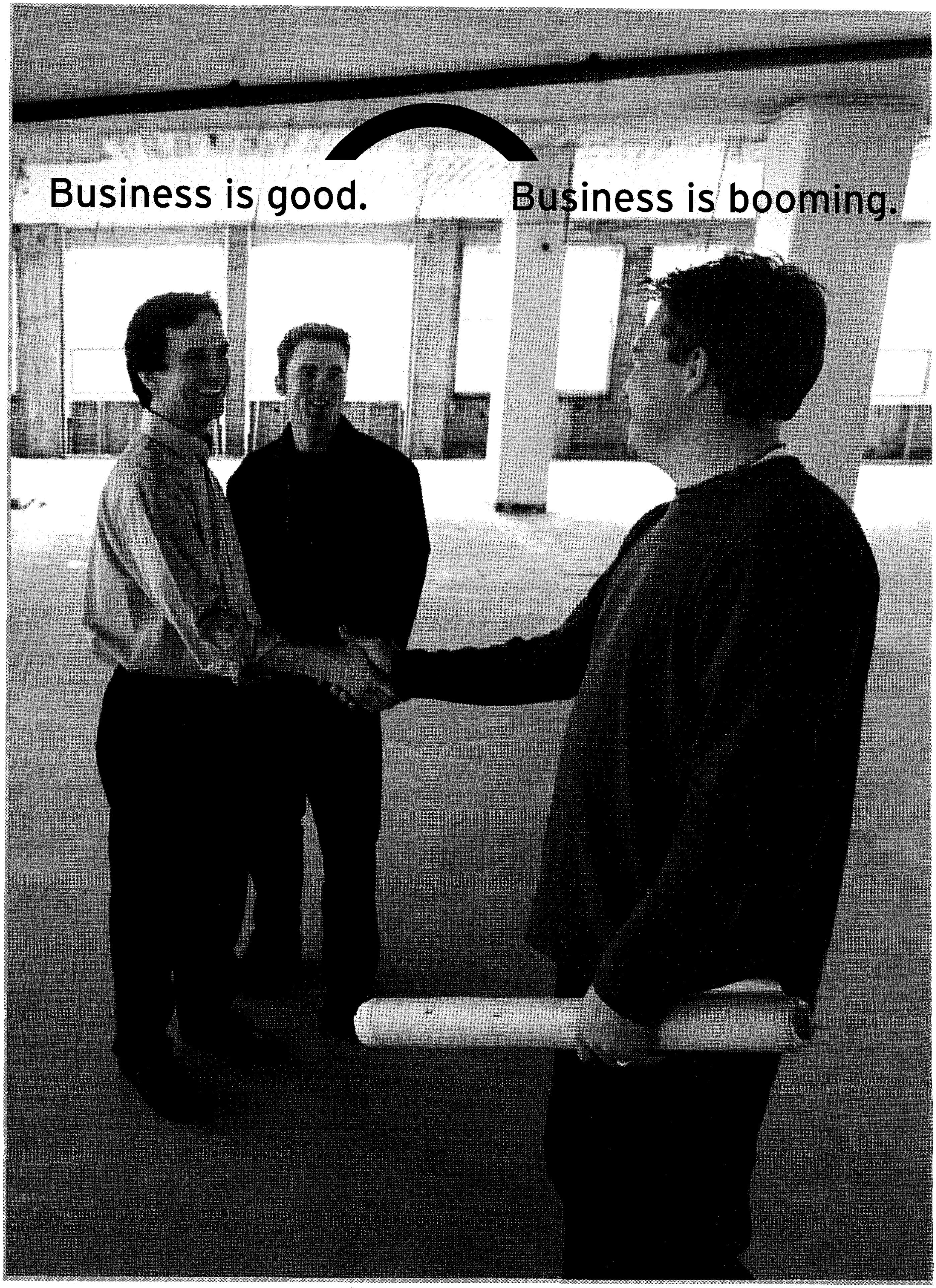
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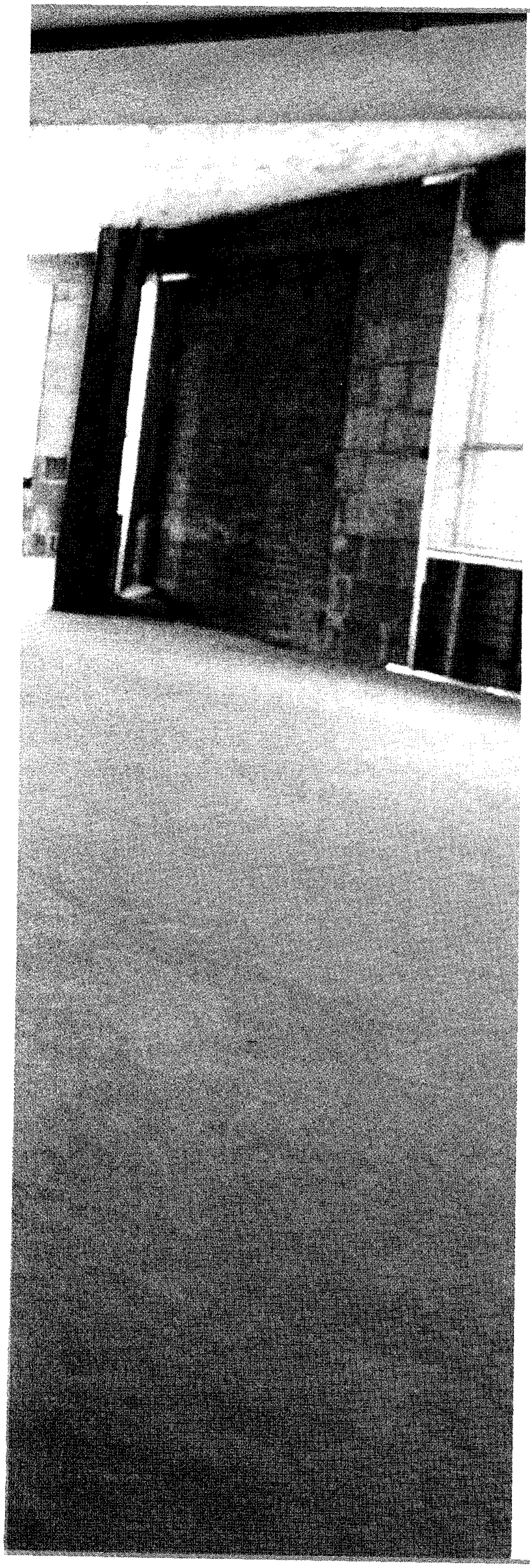

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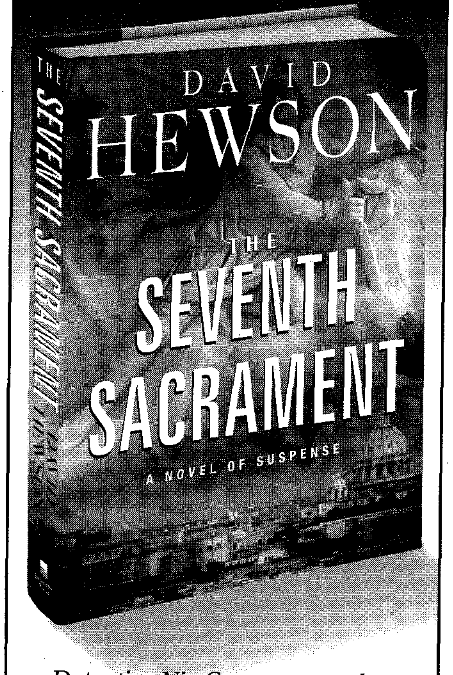

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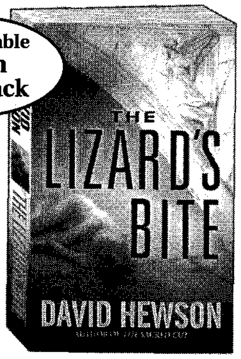

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—*The Boston Globe*

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THE NEW YORKER

AUGUST 13, 2007

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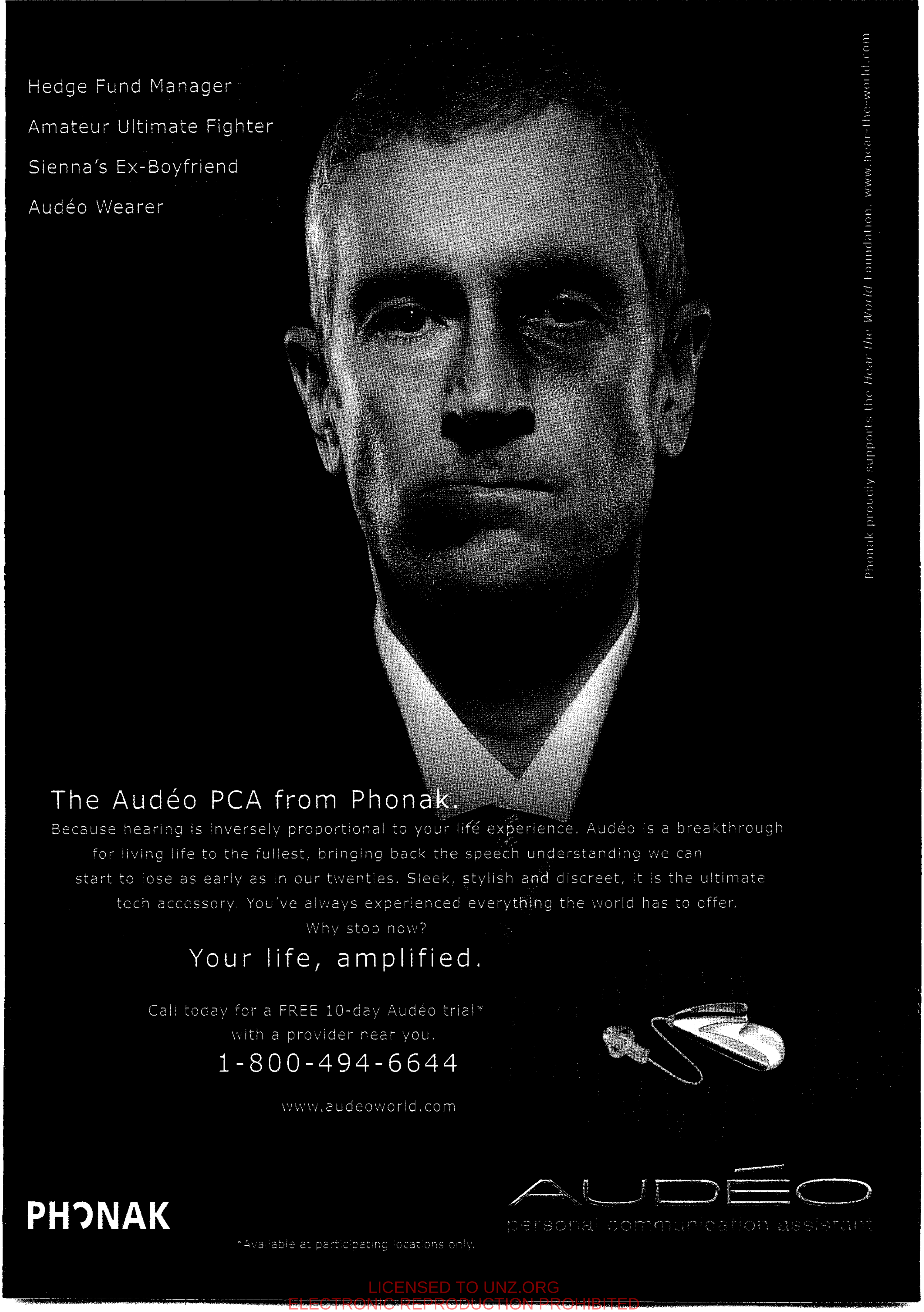

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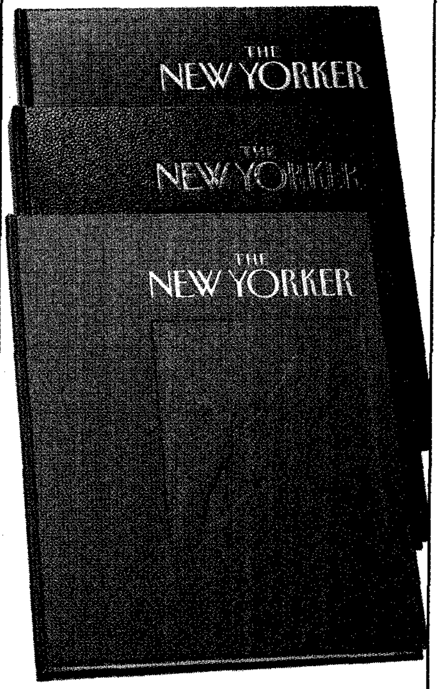

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Mayer ("The Black Sites," p. 46) is the co-author of two books, "Strange Justice" and "Landslide."

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 21) is a staff writer. His book "Ghost Wars," about the C.I.A. and Afghanistan, is available in paperback.

Oliver Sacks (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) will publish "Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain" in October.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 28) writes a regular column on economics, business, and finance. He is the author of "The Wisdom of Crowds."

Richard Preston ("An Error in the Code," p. 30) is the author of "The Hot Zone" and "The Demon in the Freezer." His latest book, "The Wild Trees," came out in April.

Yoni Brenner (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 37) is a screenwriter.

Tom Mueller ("Slippery Business," p. 38) is writing a book about the cultural and criminal history of olive oil.

Adam Zagajewski (Poem, p. 55) is a poet, novelist, and essayist. His most recent collection is "Without End: New and Selected Poems."

Burkhard Bilger ("Falling," p. 58), the author of "Noodling for Flatheads," has been a staff writer since 2001.

Roz Chast (Sketchbook, p. 52) has published "Theories of Everything," a collection of her cartoons from 1978 to 2006.

Louise Glück (Poem, p. 64) was the U.S. Poet Laureate for 2003-04. "Averno" is her tenth book of poems.

Hari Kunzru (Fiction, p. 68) will publish his third novel, "My Revolutions," in January. He is a contributor to "The Book of Other People," a fiction anthology that comes out in November and will benefit 826NYC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing children's writing skills.

Steven Shapin (A Critic at Large, p. 75) is the Franklin L. Ford Professor of the History of Science at Harvard.

Pankaj Mishra (Books, p. 80) is the author of "The Romantics," a novel, and "Temptations of the West: How to Be Modern in India, Pakistan, Tibet, and Beyond."

Mark Ulriksen (Cover) is a regular contributor. His most recent illustrated children's book is "The Biggest Parade," with text by Elizabeth Winthrop.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Hendrik Hertzberg's dispatches from the YearlyKos convention. / Postcard from Los Angeles, a new blog by *Dana Goodyear.* / Interesting Times, by *George Packer.* / An audio interview with *David Denby* about Bergman, Antonioni, and the demise of film culture. / *George Saunders* reads an Isaac Babel short story published in 1966. / Also from the archives: *Jane Mayer* on Guantánamo, *Martin Amis* on Jane Austen in Hollywood, and thousands of capsule reviews in the Film File. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events around the country.

THE MAIL

LIFE ON MARS

As the lead author of the paper offering evidence for ancient life on Mars that our team found in the Martian meteorite ALH84001, I must correct the impression conveyed by Ian Frazier that "further investigation has shown that the intriguing traces are probably not related to any kind of life" ("On Impact," July 9th & 16th). Although each of our four lines of evidence for microbial effects has been widely reëxamined (giving rise to the new cross-disciplinary field of astrobiology), none has been proved wrong and one (a local temperature compatible with life) has been generally accepted. At the recent Seventh International Conference on Mars, we presented two papers defending our hypothesis and providing new experimental evidence that the tiny magnetites in the Martian meteorite could not have been made simply by heating the rock before or while it was blasted off Mars, as has been claimed by some of our critics. Our hypothesis was, and still is, that these tiny magnetites were made by ancient bacteria on Mars, just as similar ones are made by bacteria on Earth. The ongoing observations of Mars, both from orbit and on the surface, have offered an abundance of evidence that conditions necessary for life (water, sources of energy, mild temperatures, and protection from radiation) have existed and still exist on Mars, or slightly below the surface.

David S. McKay
Chief Scientist for Astrobiology
NASA-Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center
Houston, Texas

PRESIDENTIAL INTEGRITY

Seymour M. Hersh, in his article about Army Major General Antonio M. Taguba and the investigation of the abuses at Abu Ghraib, comes close to pinpointing the real failing behind this affair ("The General's Report," June 25th). Whether extraordinary means of interrogation were, or ever are, justified is not the issue. Courage and personal integrity are. In the days after September 11, 2001, it fell to the government of President Bush to take appropriate action. If the President and his advisers believed that harsh measures were needed, they should have stated so unequivocally, then let the political and legal processes—and, ultimately, history—judge the rightness of their actions. Other Presidents have done so in the past, and some of their actions have been upheld and some condemned. But Lincoln, Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt, among others, had the courage and integrity to stand behind their decisions. Our leaders need not always be right, but we have a right to expect them always to be honest.

Leo J. Cotnoir
Manchester, N.H.

CELLULOID COUPLES

David Denby's analysis of the romantic comedy in cinema history reveals a rather discouraging trend—what Denby calls the "slacker-striver romance" ("A Fine Romance," July 23rd). This common pairing of two less than attractive individuals raises the question: in an age when our society is generally ready to empower women and men alike to achieve great heights, why is it that our movies tend to depict individuals who are basically without substance, ambition, or strength? The films of the nineteen-thirties, forties, and fifties consistently depicted women and men who possessed these qualities and who, in couples like Nick and Nora Charles in the "Thin Man" movies, encouraged and appreciated each other's strength of personality. In the course of cinema history, particularly in twentieth-century America, films have served to reflect or, in some cases, provoke trends within a society. Let's hope that the slacker-striver romance isn't one of these.

Hannah Kass
Richboro, Pa.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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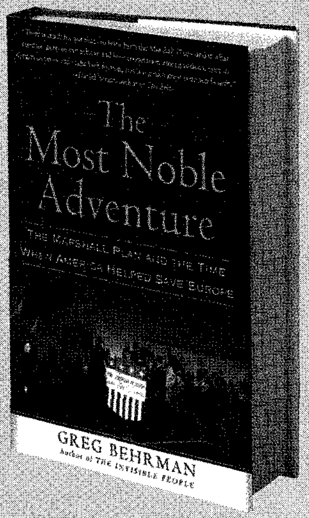
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"The Dwarf," an opera based on a short story by Oscar Wilde. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
FRINGE BENEFITS

"Walmartopia: the Musical" and "Debbie Does Dallas" are two of the New York International Fringe Festival standouts that have gone on to play Off Broadway. This year's festival has a hundred and ninety works—theatre, dance, puppetry—at twenty downtown venues. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
DRUM AND BASS

Two rhythm-section veterans grab the spotlight this week. Charlie Haden, the once and future poet of the bass, duets with four formidable pianists—Kenny Barron, Ethan Iverson, Paul Bley, and Brad Mehldau—at the Blue Note. And the drummer Louis Hayes, a hard-bop survivor who is best known for his work with Cannonball Adderley, celebrates his seventieth birthday at the Jazz Standard. (See page 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
RULE BRITANNIA

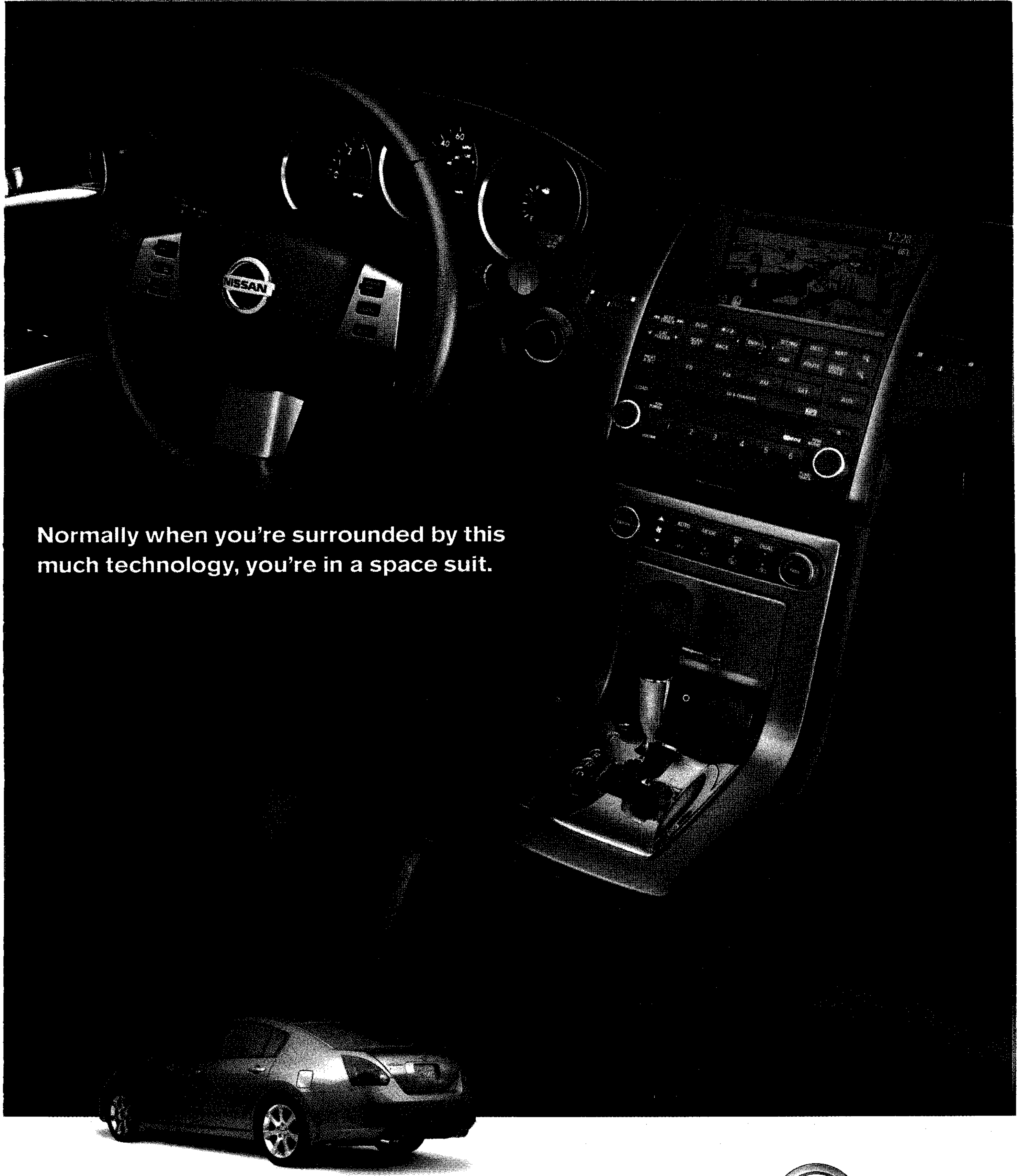
Leon Botstein's Bard Music Festival devotes the first of two weekends to "Elgar and His World," a celebration of the giant of early-twentieth-century British music on the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of his birth. (See page 14.)

MOVIES
SILENT ECHOES

The Dutch film distributor Jean Desmet's vast collection of silent-film posters, on display at MOMA, is accompanied by screenings of movies from Desmet's and the museum's holdings. All were on view in Europe from 1912 to 1914, when the feature-length film was launched; rare shorts by pioneering directors such as D. W. Griffith, Louis Feuillade, and Mack Sennett complete the program. (See page 17.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
CALL ME ISHMAEL

Herman Melville was born in New York City nearly two centuries ago this month, and a day of Melville-related activities—including a boat ride, a literary lecture, a walking tour of downtown New York, and a dramatic reading of passages from Melville's most famous works—has been organized in honor of the sometime customs inspector, seafarer, and writer. (See page 18.)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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE ALL-AMERICAN SPORT OF BIPARTISAN BASHING
The political satirist Will Durst presents his latest one-man show. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

GREASE
Kathleen Marshall directs and choreographs this revival of the musical, starring Laura Osnes and Max Crumm. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

HUMAN ERROR
The world première of a drama by Keith Reddin, about the aftermath of a plane crash. Directed by Tracy Brigden. Opens Aug. 8. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

IDOL: THE MUSICAL
A new musical about small-town teen-agers who are obsessed with Clay Aiken. Daniel Tursi directs. In previews. Opens Aug. 12. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 212-868-4444.)

IPHIGENIA 2.0
Signature Theatre Company opens the season with a New York première of a play by Charles Mee, inspired by Euripides' tale of Agamemnon, who fears that a costly war is not worth it. Tina Landau directs. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
Shakespeare in the Park's second production of the season stars Martha Plimpton, Tim Blake Nelson, Laila Robins, and Jay O. Sanders. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
Scores of new plays and musicals from around the world are performed in twenty venues across the city. Opens Aug. 10. (212-279-4488.)

RECONSTRUCTING MAMA
In this musical comedy, a Westchester family regroups after the death of its matriarch. N. David Williams wrote the music and lyrics; Stephen Svoboda, who wrote the book and co-wrote the lyrics, directs. Previews begin Aug. 9. Opens Aug. 12. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE BLACK EYED
Betty Shamieh's gorgeously conceived and realized drama, directed by Sam Gold, is set in the afterlife, one not unlike that of "No Exit." Three women—each Palestinian, but from different historical eras—climb over a partition looking for men they have lost, all martyrs. But first they must contend with a kind of gatekeeper: a fourth woman, Aiesha (Aysan Celik), who is a martyr herself. Through the women's stories—amusing, tragic, and laced with offhand bits of wisdom—Shamieh traces the elemental role that violence has played in Arab life, but she doesn't settle for absolutes. Her theatrical imagination, in its agility and its urgency, brings to mind Tony Kushner, whose faith in eloquence as an instrument of change is echoed here. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

ELECTION DAY
Josh Tobiessen's sophomoric sex farce concerns a local mayoral election and the various erotic machinations of a quintet of none too believable characters, all of whom are involved in waging the campaign—or sabotaging it. The characters include a mismatched yuppie couple, a smarmy but handsome Republican mayoral candidate, and a pair of aspiring ecoterrorists. Put them all together with some handcuffs, homemade Molotov cocktails, and a few beers and you get a sense of the play's lack of comic ingenuity. The director, Jeremy Dobrish, does what he can to keep the pacing brisk, but there's no amount of bluffing that could conceal the lack of thoughtfulness in the material; this political satire is a wasted opportunity that seems to have little grasp of current events. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

THE HANGING OF RAZOR BROWN
The première of a drama by Le Wilhelm, in which a French teacher and her students discover a noose while on a picnic. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

ICE FACTORY '07
The Ohio Theatre hosts the SoHo Think Tank's annual festival of new work, presented by companies such as New Georges and Rindfleisch. (66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

MASKED
The Israeli playwright Ilan Hatsor has written a provocative drama about three Palestinian brothers whose personal confrontations, during the intifada of 1990, mirror the great soul-destroying conflicts tearing apart their land. Even in translation, the play is an articulate calculus of loyalty and betrayal between two Arab brothers: Na'im (Arian Moayed), a proud revolutionary, and Daoud (Daoud Heidami), a collaborator who's fled from his ancestral village, only to return a marked man. A violent inquest into Daoud's actions draws in the youngest brother—Khalid (Sanjit De Silva)—who had hoped to foster some peace between his warring siblings. The action unfolds in real time, gathering momentum at the conclusion. Still, Ami Dayan's direction fails to generate the necessary menace that would drive the tragedy home: there's a crackle of tension missing. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
The Drilling Company presents Shakespeare's comedy, in a parking lot on the Lower East Side. Admission is free. (Municipal Parking Lot, at Ludlow and Broome Sts. 212-877-0099.)

MY FIRST TIME
Ken Davenport, who gave the world the Brechtian epics "The Awesome 80s Prom" and "Altar Boyz," adapts stories from the Web site myfirsttime.com for the stage, and the result is quick and relatively painless. Four actors draw on dozens of testimonials about virginity and the loss thereof—some funny, many forgettable, and a few disturbing. Most successful are the results, read at random, of an anonymous audience questionnaire taken before the show. But the titillation inherent in the subject matter eventually gives way to repetition, as we realize that some first times are as dull to the outsider as they were thrilling to the—ahem—insider. All in all, the theatrical equivalent of too many tequila shots on a blind date. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

OPUS
Primary Stages opens its season with this play by Michael Hollinger, about a string quartet that gains a new member. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE RECRUITING OFFICER
New York Classical Theatre presents George Farquhar's comedy from 1706, about a corrupt, carousing captain, performed, for free, in Central Park. (103rd St. at Central Park W. 212-252-4531.)

ROMEO AND JULIET
Classical Theatre of Harlem mounts a contemporary rendition of the romantic tragedy, complete with hip-hop and R. & B. music. Admission is free. Aug. 9-10. (Tompkins Square Park, Ave. A at St. Mark's Pl. 212-360-8290.)

SUMMER SHORTS
A festival of nine new one-act plays, including works by Warren Leight, Skip Kennon, and Tina Howe. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE TEMPEST
Harlem Summer Shakespeare presents free performances of this comedy. Alexa Kelly directs. (Riverbank State Park, 145th St. at Riverside Dr. 212-695-1596.)

TINGS DEY HAPPEN
Dan Hoyle's one-man show examines the clashing geopolitical forces in Nigeria and the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea region. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

TABLES FOR TWO
15 EAST

15 E. 15th St. (212-647-0015)—There's barely time to settle in at 15 East's sushi counter before a fellow-diner leans over and whispers, "Did you follow him here, too?" The "him" is Masato Shimizu, formerly of Jewel Bako, thirty-two and improbably boyish, with a surfer's loungy demeanor. (One foodie Web site refers to him as "the cute one.") Where other gatekeepers of rarefied sushi tend to be dour and secretive, he keeps within reach an illustrated almanac of seafood ("Grunt fish? Page seventy-three") and a stack of what can only be described as fish-fetish magazines—complete with glossy, full-bleed centerfolds—which he hands to guests perplexed by unusual species.

Marco Moreira, the owner and executive chef of both 15 East and Tocqueville—which originally occupied this address and was recently relocated a few doors down—has recruited an all-star staff: the sake sommelier comes from Masa, the soba chef from Honmura An. (A dish of handmade noodles, topped with creamy *uni*, is so luxuriant that it feels almost immodest to eat it in front of strangers.) The sushi bar is a bright white cube; in the dining room, you are plunged into darkness. A long banquette flanks the slate-gray wall, and above hang giant box lanterns that appear to contain light without actually shedding any. It's a sexy space, with the throb of tropicália in the background—Moreira grew up in Brazil—and low votives simmering inside wraps of kombu-textured paper.

The menu offers two divergent experiences. The non-sushi half (Moreira's domain) has some fanciful moments, including a delicate spaghettini of *yamaimo* and feathery tempura latkes paired with curry, green-tea, and chile salts, but mostly it's content with the predictable: a plate of wild salmon "five ways," hunks of robust, oddly chewy Colorado Kobe rib eye. But at the sushi bar on a recent night, surprises were legion. The slow-poached octopus was almost absurdly tender, having arrived live at the restaurant that morning and apparently massaged to death. And a pillowy white slab—squid? swordfish?—turned out to be some two dozen baby white shrimp, curled together. (Open Mondays through Fridays for lunch and dinner and Saturdays for dinner. Sushi à la carte $4-$12; entrées $24-$45; tasting menus $75-$120.)

—*Ligaya Mishan*

OUT OF TOWN

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
Ken Roht and his Orphean Circus headline the Spiegeltent. Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Sorcerer," directed by Erica Schmidt, runs through Aug. 12. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

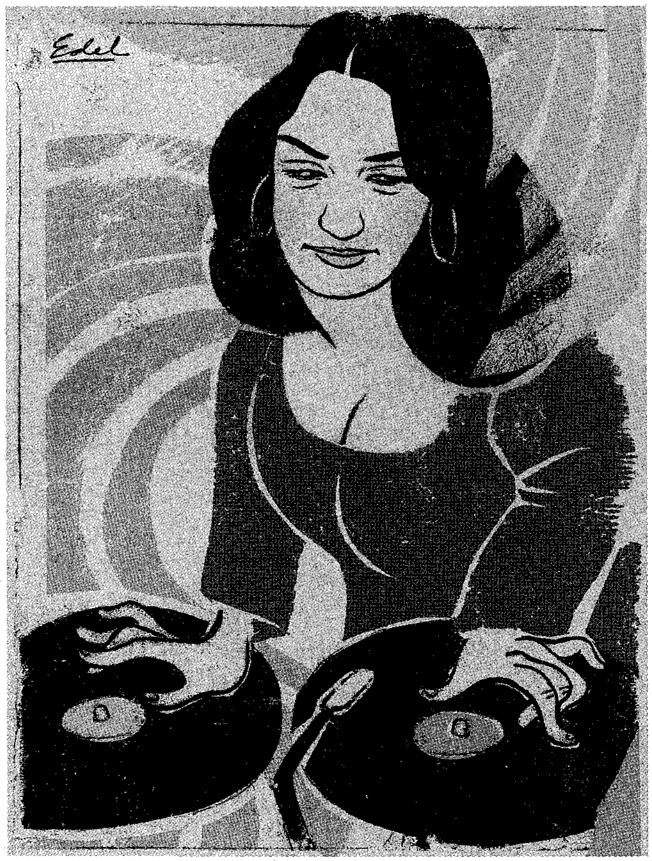
BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
Julie Jensen's play "Two-Headed" follows Mormon women living in a polygamist community in the late eighteen-hundreds. Vivian Matalon directs "Morning's at Seven," through Aug. 11. "Mrs. Warren's Profession," directed by Anders Cato, starts performances Aug. 14. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
On the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, "Richard III," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays in repertory with "As You Like It," directed by Kurt Rhoads. *For more information, visit* www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
Kate Burton, Ginnifer Goodwin, and Dylan Baker star in "The Corn Is Green," by Emlyn Williams, through Aug. 12. "The Physicists," directed by Kevin O'Rourke, opens Aug. 7, and "Crimes of the Heart," directed by Kathleen Turner, opens Aug. 8. For a full schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: Pier 17, South Street Seaport. 212-279-4200. **ANGRY YOUNG WOMEN IN LOW-RISE JEANS WITH HIGH-CLASS ISSUES:** Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 212-352-3101. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BRIG:** Living Theatre, 19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DEUCE:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **EURYDICE:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **FROST/NIXON:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GONE MISSING:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **OLD ACQUAINTANCE:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **SEUSSICAL:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-332-0001. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **33 TO NOTHING:** Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101. **TOM CREAN: ANTARCTIC EXPLORER:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.



DJ Rekha spins her records at Celebrate Brooklyn!

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Aug. 9: **Toots & the Maytals.** If Bob Marley and the Wailers were the heart of reggae, then Frederick (Toots) Hibbert and his Maytals must surely be its soul: it was the group's 1968 hit, "Do the Reggay," that gave ska, dub, rock steady, and every other substratum of Jamaican music one all-encompassing name. Bring your dancing shoes for "Funky Kingston" and "Pressure Drop." Aug. 11: The Canadian all-girl metal band **Kittie** easily beat the black-clad boys at their own game, and they have four disarmingly aggressive albums to prove it. Aug. 14: The neo-soul singer **Angie Stone.**

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 8-9: **Crowded House** was formed out of the ashes of the storied New Zealand New Wave outfit Split Enz and led by the singer-songwriter Neil Finn; it went on to eclipse that band with a string of critically acclaimed albums of lush, thoughtful pop before calling it quits, in 1996. Despite the absence of the original drummer, Paul Hester (who took his own life in 2005), Finn has reassembled Crowded House and recorded a new album, "Time on Earth."

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 9: The **Cribs,** three brothers from England who are young enough to have come of age listening to the Strokes (a band they clearly admire), enjoy poking fun at the hipster scene. They're here with songs from their new album, "Men's Needs, Women's Needs, Whatever."

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—Aug. 9: Top-shelf indie rock with the **Hold Steady,** the **Big Sleep,** and the **Teenage Prayers.** Aug. 10: The "Bollywood in Brooklyn" night features a screening of the 1977 Hindi musical "Hum Kisi Se Kum Nahin" and a performance by **DJ Rekha,** who, for the past decade, has been sharing the joys of updated Punjabi folk music with her "Basement Bhangra" parties at S.O.B.'s. Aug. 11: The euphoric grooves of **Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars** and the sweet sounds of **Sekouba Bambino** (a.k.a. "the Golden Voice of Guinea") resonate at the daylong African Festival.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—Aug. 8: The **Beastie Boys** break out their old-school hip-hop moves for a benefit show. Aug. 9: The **Black Crowes** take the stage. Led by the Robinson brothers, these seventies-flavored Southern-fried retro rockers fervently pine for the days of Zeppelinesque hedonism. Aug. 11: An afternoon of Crescent City splendor with **Galactic, Monk Boudreaux & the Golden Eagle Mardi Gras Indians,** and the **Soul Rebel Brass Band.** Aug. 12: Led by Marie Daulne, **Zap Mama** weaves a vocal tapestry out of cool, sweet melodies and African, European, and American rhythms. Zap Mama began as an a-cappella group, but in the late nineties, Daulne—a native Zairean of Belgian descent—added instruments. In this decade, she's spent time collaborating with members of the Philadelphia hip-hop scene. Ahmir (?uestlove) Thompson, Common, and Erykah Badu appeared on the group's previous album, "Ancestry in Progress," from 2004. Its new record, "Supermoon," has an even broader cast of characters, including the drummer Tony Allen, the bassists Meshell Ndegéocello and Will Lee, and the guitarists David Gilmore and Michael Franti. With **Angélique Kidjo,** who plays an eclectic fusion of jazz, R. & B., and the traditional music of her native Benin.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Aug. 13: The pair of mirror-ball-crazed Danes known as **Junior Senior.**

JONES BEACH
Wantagh, N.Y. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 14: **Def Leppard, Foreigner,** and **Styx** all commanded slavish devotion from fans of hard-rocking demi-metal in the eighties (yet only Def Leppard has any credibility among the metal cognoscenti, since it shares a gene pool with Iron Maiden and Judas Priest). Two decades later, they all seem perfectly comfortable playing to well-heeled old fans. The fact that each outfit has a lineup strikingly different from the one that made it famous is strictly a quibble for die-hards.

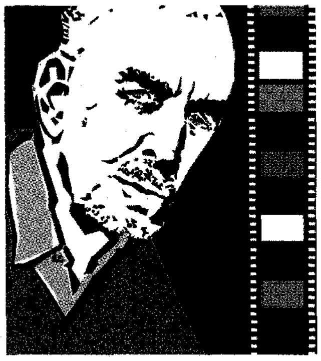
KEYSPAN PARK
1904 Surf Ave., Coney Island, Brooklyn (212-307-7171)—Aug. 9: **Daft Punk** is a quirky electronic duo that, along with Air, restored the musical reputation of France by making dance music that was both progressive and accessible. The band was recently given further kudos when the rapper Kanye West sampled one of its tracks for his single "Stronger." With the angular disco-punk New Yorkers the **Rapture.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Aug. 9-10: **Los Campesinos!,** a septet from Wales, make their New York City début. The Spanish name aside, this group has an exuberant output of quirky pop music that's quickly winning them an ardent following.

RUMSEY PLAYFIELD
Central Park, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 14: The neo-bluegrass trio **Nickel Creek,** who have been together for seventeen years (two of the members, Chris Thile and Sara Watkins, have been in the group since they were eight), are going on hiatus. But before taking a break, they are touring with the piano-playing pop singer **Fiona Apple,** whom they've appeared with in recent

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE SILENCE

Ingmar Bergman, who died last week after a life spent directing movies, plays, and opera productions, was perhaps the most influential of all filmmakers



as well as the most widely parodied. In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, antic young moviegoing couples quarrelled in mock Swedish, film students spoofed his morbid dream sequences, Woody Allen sent the hooded figure of death from "The Seventh Seal" stalking through "Love and Death." Most of the fun was produced by their exasperated love of the director: Bergman, who combined theatrical sensation, visual symbolism, and a post-Strindbergian candor (no one ever insisted more heatedly on the coldness of the human heart), was so ambitious and unrelenting that audiences could, at the same time, be stunned by his most powerful moments and outraged by his solemnity. The range of his work is extraordinary, stretching from his lyrical and erotic early films, such as "Summer with Monika" (1953), to the startling metaphysical explorations of "Persona" (1966) and the searing bourgeois domesticity of "Scenes from a Marriage" (1973).

—*David Denby*

years at the Los Angeles club Largo. Nickel Creek will perform their own set as well as backing Apple.

SPIEGELTENT
Pier 17, South Street Seaport (212-279-4200)—Aug. 13-14: **Badly Drawn Boy.** The boy in question, the talented Brit Damon Gough, is no longer all that young; he's in his late thirties (and a father to boot). He had a reputation early on for unpredictable, shoddy, and often irritating live performances, but he seems to have had a change of heart. He hasn't abandoned his signature wool hat and scruffy beard, but he is now, for the most part, delivering impassioned sets of material from his latest album, "Born in the UK." It's a wry nod to one of his heroes, Bruce Springsteen, in more than just its title: the collection of songs, ranging from introspective ballads to anthemic rockers, would do the Boss proud.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 7-12: The Cuban émigré **Arturo Sandoval** is an athletic trumpeter who regularly transforms excess into a virtue.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—If sequoia trees could make music, they'd probably sound much like **Charlie Haden's** bass. Taking his own sweet time and letting his massive tone do the heavy lifting, Haden, over the course of a five-decade career, has significantly enriched the bands of Ornette Coleman and Keith Jarrett as well as his own Quartet West and the Liberation Music Orchestra. But Haden also likes to scale down to duo settings; here, the mighty minimalist duets with four superb pianists on successive nights. Aug. 7: **Kenny Barron.** Aug. 8: **Ethan Iverson.** Aug. 9: **Paul Bley.** Aug. 10-12: **Brad Mehldau.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 7-12: The **Cedar Walton** quintet. Beneath the pianist Walton's mild-mannered surface is a jazzman of steely power and intelligence. He's a renowned improviser and composer of durable jazz standards.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 8: The old-time swing of **Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks.** Aug. 9-11: **Tierney Sutton,** an engaging singer who imaginatively revives familiar standards, is still riding the critical acclaim from her most recent album, "On the Other Side," released earlier this year. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 7-12: **Louis Hayes.** A veteran of the golden-era bands of Cannonball Adderley, Horace Silver, and Oscar Peterson, this stellar drummer has also worked with such significant stylists as Dexter Gordon and Woody Shaw. Now he's a venerable bandleader himself. Three of his ensembles, including the Cannonball Legacy Band, will be on hand this week to celebrate his seventieth birthday.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—The trombonist and tuba virtuoso **Wycliffe Gordon** (here with his quintet Aug. 7-12) is a card-carrying member of the Wynton Marsalis jazz academy, as comfortable with traditional New Orleans styles as he is with modern jazz.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Impressionist and Early Modern Paintings: The Clark Brothers Collect."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"Frank Stella on the Roof."** Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Neo Rauch at the Met: Para"** presents new paintings by the Leipzig-based artist. Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years."** Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' at 100."** Through Aug. 27. **"Present Tense: Photographs by JoAnn Verburg."** The photographs in this impressive mid-career survey will come as news to many. But operating just under the radar for more than thirty years has allowed Verburg's quiet, thoughtful work to flourish. Nearly all of it incorporates a sense of passing time and constant movement, sometimes in multi-panel pieces that suggest a sequence of film frames, sometimes through impressionistic passages of blurred soft-focus. At the heart of the show is a series of pictures of the artist's husband, the poet Jim Moore, reading or snoozing next to a newspaper. With these sunny, vibrantly colored images, Verburg conflates intimate moments and breaking news, cozy domesticity and nagging anxiety. Through Nov. 5. ♦ **"Sensation and Sentiment: Cinema Posters 1912–14."** Through Aug. 27. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8. The museum will be open until 9 on Thursday evenings through Aug. 30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—The telescoping spiral of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim rotunda is in the midst of a restoration, so it's a timely moment to consider how geometry sculpts the void. **"The Shapes of Space"** culls works from the permanent collection and is evolving with the summer, moving upward as the renovation progresses. Through Sept. 5. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—Luxury and ruin keep close company in **"Rudolf Stingel."** Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era."** Through Sept. 16. ♦ **"Resistance Is . . ."** Protest is a purported leitmotif of "Summer of Love," the museum's current, crowd-pleasing blockbuster. But the real dissent lies in this companion exhibition, tucked into the intimate fifth-floor mezzanine gallery and drawn from the museum's holdings. The show shifts between responses to events of the nineteen-sixties—Warhol's screen print of the Birmingham race riots, Martha Rosler's photomontage critiquing the Vietnam War, Richard Avedon's photograph of the Chicago Seven—and more recent works (many of which riff on those responses) by Wayne Gonzales, Andrea Bowers, Sam Durant, and Josephine Meckseper. If you're struck by déjà vu, it may be because the emphasis on American insurgence recalls "Down by Law," an adjunct to the 2006 Whitney Biennial that was installed in the same room. Through Sept. 2. ♦ **"Lincoln Kirstein."** Through Aug. 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Gold."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ The recently opened Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins explores the science of evolution. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War."** Through Aug. 12. ♦ **"The *Jewish Daily Forward:* Embracing an Immigrant Community."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Berlin Street Scene."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

KIM DEMARCO

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"Janis and Tina at Madison Square Garden, 1969," by Amalie R. Rothschild, at Staley-Wise (560 Broadway, at Prince Street).

NOGUCHI MUSEUM
9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-204-7088)—**"Survey of Paris Abstractions."** Through Sept. 2. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Organizing Chaos."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Peter Young: 1963-1977."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Linder."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Liquid Sky,"** by Ball-Nogues Studio, winners from the 2007 Young Architects Program. Through Sept. 24. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Il Lee."** Hundreds of thousands of disposable ballpoint pens have passed through the Korean-born, Brooklyn-based artist's hands over the years, and he's mastered his medium. He knows how the ink will warm to produce a free-flowing line; he's learned how to build up shadow and leave room for light. His works, which integrate Sol LeWitt-style minimalism and *sumukhwa,* an Asian ink-painting tradition, range from small studies to a new, fifty-foot-long work on paper that looks like an abstract meditation on a mountain range. Lee's bent toward geometric abstraction and his slow accumulation of marks and lines suggest a free-hand version of Spirograph suffused with Zen-like grace. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"David Adjaye: Making Public Buildings."** Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Midnight's Daydream."** Works by participants in the museum's 2006-07 artists-in-residence program, featuring Titus Kaphar, Wardell Milan II, and Demetrius Oliver. Through Oct. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: Many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

EUGÈNE ATGET
Perhaps because Atget's photographs of Paris in the early twentieth century were created as documents, not art works, they have an unusual purity and power. This group of twenty-six albumen prints, all in warm sand tones, demonstrates his range and hints at his quiet brilliance. The subjects are both humble and grand: a doorway, a stairwell, a baroque bed, a formal garden, a carved stone urn. Mops and a bucket rest in the foyer of a modest apartment house; rows of wooden chairs are swallowed up in the soaring interior of Saint-Sulpice. Although Atget's Paris is frozen in time, it has a distinct heartbeat. Through Sept. 8. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223.)

MIKE KELLEY
Kelley puts a vacuous conceptual-art spin on folk-art mosaics in five big panels (most around six feet tall), on which glittery flotsam has been embedded in grout. One is a gold-tone monochrome; another is studded with political buttons ("Nixon Now" makes an appearance). The rest conglomerate everything from cowrie shells, Pokemon figures, and a tiny bust of Pope John Paul II to a tiger-striped plastic bracelet, giant faux pearls, and a couple of thirty-days-sober A.A. medallions. It all looks as tacky as a junk drawer, and about as interesting. Through Aug. 10. (Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060.)

SUSAN MEISELAS
In the mid-nineties, the Magnum photographer, best known for her work in Nicaragua and Kurdistan, gained access to a pseudo-posh Manhattan S & M club called Pandora's Box and photographed its crew of leather-corseted dominatrices on the job. The series is neither as gritty nor as intimately engaged as her photographs of carnival strippers from the seventies, but it's a fascinating view of a hidden and now-vanished world. Seen in lurid color, Mistresses Brigette, Tanya, Delilah, and their co-workers perform theatrical acts of humiliation and punishment in rooms that might have appeared in a perverse version of "The World of Interiors." For the clients, this is both Heaven and Hell; for viewers, it's a glimpse of degradation à la mode. Through Sept. 8. (Cohen Amador, 41 W. 57th St. 212-759-6740.)

"88:88"
When some digital clocks are on the blink, their displays read "88:88." Here, the code sets up an oblique, formalist meditation on political, social, and ecological failures. Christoph Büchel's suitcase-style portable voting booth, with its plastic pouch of chads, establishes a theme of fraud, while sculptures by Drew Heitzler (a fake rock perched on a low-lying platform of deck planks) and Shana Lutker (a ziggurat made of stacks of bundled papers) look like monuments to suburban dystopia. Installed along the baseboard is Heitzler's frieze of black-and-white video stills—viewed in passing they become a kind of flip-book animation in which dinosaur-like machinery pummels the earth. Through Aug. 11. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

"TEXT MESSAGES"
Thirty-two artists forgo the BlackBerry in favor of comic-book pages, calligraphic musings, typewriter drawings, and tongue-in-cheek signs. Joe

Amrhein's colorful, vertical stack of words on transparent vellum pokes fun at itself—and at opaque artspeak—with the phrase "a grab bag of techniques and media." Dottie Attie's cloud of tiny letters suggests but defies legibility, as does a pen-and-ink page of stylized signatures by Saul Steinberg. Joe Brainard and Robbin Ami Silverberg contribute diminutive, reliquary-like constructions (Brainard's reads "Sigh"), and Jules de Balincourt's no-frills red text on white panel declares itself a "Corporate Discount Painting." Through Aug. 15. (Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MORTON BARTLETT
Bartlett, who's often pigeonholed as an outsider artist, sculpted, dressed, and photographed dolls in the mid-nineteen-fifties. The dolls themselves—nearly all depicting pre-pubescent girls—are alarmingly lifelike and vivacious. But they're not playthings, they're fetish objects; three occupy the gallery like children of the damned. Photographs situate these odd creatures in studio settings that anticipate the work of Laurie Simmons and Cindy Sherman, especially in a group of vivid new color prints made from slides. But the wall of small black-and-white images, which opens with a prim self-portrait and closes with a nude teen doll, is far more unsettling. Through Aug. 17. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

JONAS WOOD
Wood's paintings are extremely likable—although "reassuring" might be an equally apt description. Like fashion designers or musicians that draw on styles of earlier eras, Wood has hit on a formula that is at once familiar and fresh. He borrows heavily from David Hockney (the palette), Stuart Davis (the spasmodic, decorative abstraction), and Alice Neel, whose 1970 portrait of Andy Warhol feels like a template for the whole show. The high points are the details: hands and faces that go Cubist just when they seem to resolve. Wood's "Double Self-Portrait," in which the artist sports a leisure suit and tie, is the best place to start, although "Guest Room," plastered with family portraits in which nearly everyone holds a mangy pet, is pretty fabulous, too. Through Aug. 10. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

"CIRCUMVENTING THE CITY"
Favoring materials like Plexiglas, lumber, and drywall, the artists here take architecture as their premise and formalism as their challenge. The results are mixed. Jedediah Caesar's enigmatic trio of objects—including a battered, paint-spattered box housing a sooty chunk of resin—commands attention, as do David Brooks's pile of graphite rocks and Valerie Hegarty's trompe-l'oeil sculpture of a crack in the wall (a fourteen-foot-long fissure made of paint, paper, and glue). Constructivist-flavored works by Sarah Braman, Yuri Masnyj, and Ian Pedigo, while witty, appear almost interchangeable. Through Aug. 10. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

"LIGHT, TIME, AND THREE DIMENSIONS"
The show looks like a blue-chip tag sale—too crowded with big sculptures and too disjointed. But it contains some intriguing works (some recent, others from the sixties and seventies), and one might be tempted to mentally curate smaller setups. A beautiful Dan Flavin piece from 1973—a vertical column of six fluorescent circles, alternating cool and warm whites—makes an obvious companion for light works by James Turrell and Bill Culbert. But imagine it installed closer to Robert Irwin's 1967 reflective acrylic column, or alongside Kiki Smith's giant, pinafored "Alice," cast in bronze, then painted in white auto-body paint, with Tim Hawkinson's hypertrophic cardboard figure looking on. Through Aug. 24. (PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

DANCE

PILOBOLUS
The long-standing collaborative concludes its run, with three repertory programs, each capped with a New York première. (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 7-8 at 7:30, Aug. 9-10 at 8, and Aug. 11 at 2 and 8.)

COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET / TAKE DANCE COMPANY
The two companies sharing the bill at Central Park SummerStage have little in common beyond the technical accomplishment of their dancers and the gleaming pedigrees of their founders: Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson, of Complexions, were both dancers at Alvin Ailey, and Takehiro Ueyama was a longtime member of Paul Taylor. In his choreographic style, Rhoden tends toward urbanity, explosive energy, even fierceness; Ueyama is more contemplative, abstract, and musically attuned. But Complexions' diverse and beautiful dancers, especially the elegant Richardson and the regal Drew Jacoby, are reason enough to attend. (Rumsey Playfield, Central Park W. at 72nd St. 212-360-2777. Aug. 10 at 8.)

NĀ LEI HULU I KA WĒKIU
At Lincoln Center's "Out of Doors" series, the San Francisco-based hula company stays true to tradition while displaying a sense of humor. This Hawaiian dance, born of Polynesian sacred ritual, with its swaying hips and decorously flowing arms, is full of gentleness and joy. The ensemble offers it both in its traditional form—accompanied by such instruments as the *ipu* gourd drum—and with a twist, set to opera or pop, with the dancers dressed in non-grass-skirt getups. (Damrosch Park Band Shell. 212-546-2656. Aug. 10-11 at 8.)

DRUMSONG AFRICAN BALLET THEATRE
The Harlem-based company, formerly known as Sabar Ak Ru Afriq, brings the *sabar*-style dance and drumming of Senegambia to Lincoln Center's "Out of Doors" series, telling folklore-based stories with celebratory exuberance. (Josie Robertson Plaza. 212-546-2656. Aug. 11 at 6.)

SMUIN BALLET
The choreographer Michael Smuin's untimely death, last April, imbues his company's Joyce season with a poignancy, as his excellent and devoted dancers present a mixed bill that includes his last piece for the company, "Schubert Scherzo." The four works on the program represent the range of Smuin's easy, unaffected style—a fluent mix of ballet, modern dance, jazz, tap, and Broadway flourishes. "Obrigado, Brazil" is a sunny and sensual homage to Brazilian music; "Bells of Dublin" is a tap number to a song by the Irish folk group the Chieftains. "Shinju," from 1975, is the oldest work on the program and, with its tragic story and Kabuki touches, an oddity as well. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 13-14 at 7:30. Through Aug. 18.)

TRISHA BROWN DANCE COMPANY
Lincoln Center's "Out of Doors" series sports a sixties theme this year, but some of the selections presented by this stellar company, a product of that decade, date from the spare seventies. These include "Accumulation," the first in a series of works based on mathematical progressions, and "Spanish Dance," a witty variation on the same idea: the dancers pile up into a wall. Brown's more recent and broader aesthetic—her way around the wall—is represented by the playful cantilevering of "Present Tense," and her forays into opera are exemplified by the Monteverdi score of "Canto/Pianto." (Damrosch Park Band Shell. 212-546-2656. Aug. 14 at 8.)

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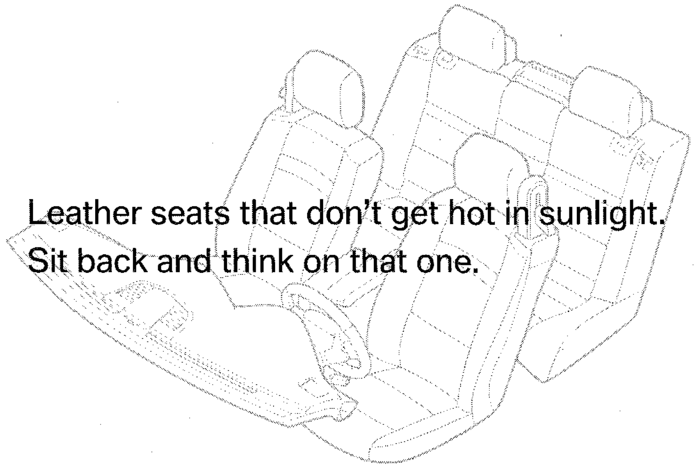

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GREAT DANES

Tough guys may not dance, but real men have no fear of the exuberant, the foolish, or the loud sweater. Witness Junior Senior, a duo from Denmark whose darkest mood is probably "psyched." Junior Senior's stock-in-trade is aggressively optimistic and genre-blind dance music that switches blithely from chic to corny in the space of one verse. Senior, the openly gay member, declaims like an aerobics instructor looking for very specific results—"Shake your coconuts until the milk comes out!"—and Junior, the openly straight member, has a rough, puppyish voice that can carry a tune but is unlikely to put Rihanna out of business. In their grave dedication to silliness, they most resemble the B-52's, a link made explicit on their new album, "Hey Hey My My Yo Yo," on which Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson sing backup. I have exhaustingly reliable evidence that children love the band's recordings, and less exhausting evidence that the band retains its exuberance when it plays live. After a long absence from the States, Junior Senior will appear at the Highline Ballroom on Aug. 13, a perfect opportunity to terminate your inner Grinch.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW

The Mark Morris Dance Group returns to the Ted Shawn Theatre Aug. 7-11, once again inviting musicians from nearby Tanglewood. In Morris's newest work, "Looky," set to a recording of a Disklavier performing Kyle Gann's score, the dancers play with various kinds of spectatorship—in a museum, in a night club. Morris's classic "Love Song Waltzes" joins two less substantial recent works: "Candleflowerdance," set to Stravinsky, and "Italian Concerto," without the choreographer in its central solo. ♦ At the Doris Duke Aug. 9-12, nathantrice/RITUALS presents four works. Trice is statuesque, strong, and intense; his dances look like muscular sacraments. The selections include "Conversations," an intertwining of three couples to Keith Jarrett recordings, and Trice's best-received work to date, "Prophet & Betrayer," a dramatic duet for the choreographer and the eleven-year-old Michael J. Walters. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 26.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL

The boy genius of Salzburg, ostensibly the focus of the festival that bears his name, makes something of a comeback this week after being nearly squeezed out by other composers. Aug. 8 at 8: Louis Langrée, the festival's music director, and the Mostly Mozart Orchestra venture beyond the eighteenth century by teaming up with the soprano Sophie Karthäuser, the baritone Dietrich Henschel, and the superb Swedish Radio Choir in excerpts from Rachmaninoff's Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and Fauré's Requiem (complete). (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 8 at 10:30: The compelling Canadian piano virtuoso Marc-André Hamelin, who is having a strong showing in town this summer, continues the festival's "Little Night Music" series at the Kaplan Penthouse, which will be set up cabaret-style for a concert of solo works by Mozart and Schumann (the grand Fantasy in C Major, Op. 17). ♦ Aug. 10-11 at 8: The up-and-coming conductor Ludovic Morlot leads the festival orchestra in a mostly Mozart program that features the composer's incidental music for "Thamos, King of Egypt" and the Violin Concerto No. 5 (with Christian Tetzlaff), along with Schubert's "Tragic" Symphony (No. 4). (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 10 at 10:30: Tetzlaff, a chamber musician of extraordinary intensity and insight, joins the pianist Shai Wosner for a late-night concert of sonatas for violin and piano by Mozart and Ravel as well as Kurtág's crystalline "Tre Pezzi." (Kaplan Penthouse.) ♦ Aug. 11 at 10:30: Zefiro, an Italian wind ensemble, makes its American début in the "Little Night Music" series, performing Mozart's ebullient Serenade in B-Flat Major, K. 361 ("Gran Partita"). (Kaplan Penthouse.) ♦ Aug. 12 at 11 A.M.: Zefiro returns for a Sunday "morning coffee" concert featuring arrangements of music from "Le Nozze di Figaro" and "Don Giovanni." (Walter Reade Theatre.) (212-721-6500.)

OUT OF TOWN

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Aug. 8 at 7: Things are getting bouncier at the flutist Marya Martin's classy little Hamptons festival. The week begins with a concert of contemporary works employing electronic sounds, by Derek Bermel, Carl Vine, Gerard Beljon, and the American master George Crumb ("Voice of the Whale"); sitting in with Martin are two unflappable young musicians, the cellist Edward Arron and the pianist Andrew Russo. (Children's Museum of the East End, Bridgehampton, N.Y.) ♦ Aug. 12 at 6:30: The recent Chamber Symphony by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec will be bookended by two E-flat-major masterworks, by Beethoven (the Piano Quartet) and Dvořák (the String Quintet, Op. 97, "American"), in a concert featuring such musicians as Martin, the hornist Erik Ralske, and the pianist Christopher Taylor. (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church.) (631-537-6368.)

TANGLEWOOD

Boston's musical duchy is in full stride, presenting a vital mix of music old and new. Aug. 8 at 8:30: The absorbing pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard, never a slave to conventional programming, offers a fascinating recital featuring Schumann's "Songs of the Dawn" (his last major piano work), George Benjamin's "Piano Figures," selections from Bach's "Art of Fugue," and three pieces by Elliott Carter (including "Intermittences"). ♦ Aug. 10 at 8:30: Aimard returns as the guest of James Levine and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Ravel's sublime Piano Concerto in G Major, part of a concert also featuring Carter's "Three Illusions" and modern classics by Ives ("Three Places in New England") and Bartók (the Concerto for Orchestra). ♦ Aug. 11 at 8:30: Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos takes the helm for a B.S.O. concert featuring Schumann's "Rhenish" Symphony, Stravinsky's 1919 Suite from "The Firebird," and Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with Itzhak Perlman). ♦ Aug. 11 at 2 and Aug. 12-14 at 7:30: Opera performances are never far off at James Levine's Tanglewood. Next comes **"Così Fan Tutte,"** in which the excellent singers and players of the Tanglewood Music Center will appear in a fully staged production directed by Ira Siff. (Note: Kazem Abdullah, a Tanglewood conducting fellow, takes over from Levine at the Aug. 13 performance.) ♦ Aug. 12 at 2:30: Does Haydn's "Mass in Time of War," a repertory staple for two centuries, have a more powerful effect on audiences when it's actually performed in wartime? De Burgos returns to conduct it as the finale of another B.S.O. concert, with the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and the singers Sally Matthews, Paula Murphy, Eric Cutler, and Dietrich Henschel as soloists; in the first half, Emanuel Ax will be the guest artist in a performance of Mozart's sunnier Piano Concerto No. 9 ("Jeunehomme"). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Four operas on the subject of Orpheus and Eurydice. Aug. 9 at 8 and Aug. 11 at 1:30: Gluck's **"Orphée et Eurydice,"** presented in the Romantic-era adaptation by Berlioz and featuring Michael Maniaci and Amanda Pabyan; Julian Wachner conducts. ♦ Aug. 10 at 8 and Aug. 13 at 2: A delightfully naughty (and musically persuasive) production of Offenbach's **"Orpheus in the Underworld,"** with the fine veterans Joyce Castle and Jake Gardner joining such impressive newcomers as Marc Heller and Joélle Harvey; Jean-Marie Zeitouni leads an accompaniment with plenty of élan. ♦ Aug. 11 at 8 and Aug. 14 at 2: The last opera to join the schedule is the first great opera of the Western tradition, Monteverdi's **"Orfeo."** The dulcet young tenor Michael Slattery, who has sung the title role at Paris's Théâtre du Châtelet, repeats it here, with Megan Monahan as Euridice; Antony Walker. ♦ Aug. 12 at 2: Philip Glass's **"Orphée,"** the first of his operas ever to be presented by the company, is based on the film by Jean Cocteau. Three estimable singers—Philip Cutlip, Lisa Saffer, and Caroline Worra—take the leading roles; Anne Manson. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL: "ELGAR AND HIS WORLD"

Now that Sibelius's reputation has been restored to a level rivalling that of Mahler, is Elgar, another contemporary, far behind? The first major English composer after Purcell makes for a more difficult case, since the number of acknowledged masterworks by him is substantially smaller. But the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of his birth provides a welcome excuse for Leon Botstein's full-immersion treatment. Aug. 10 at 8: The composer's magisterial Piano Quintet, Op. 84, peeks out of a program that otherwise features a selection of his early salon music (such as "Salut d'Amour") and a group of choral works; the players include the excellent Daedalus Quartet. ♦ Aug. 11 at 8: Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra in the "Pomp and Circumstance" March No. 4, "In the South,"

MAXIMILIAN BODE

and the "Enigma" Variations, along with works by Parry and Stanford, two of Elgar's prominent colleagues. ♦ Aug. 12 at 5:30: "Imperial Pomp and Pastoral Nostalgia" finds Botstein leading members of the A.S.O. in music for strings and brass by Elgar (including the limpid Serenade and the stirring Introduction and Allegro for strings) as well as Vaughan Williams's "Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis" and a selection of minor works. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. Through Aug. 19. For a full schedule of concerts, symposia, and pre-concert talks, see www.fishercenter.bard.edu.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The intimate yet imposing Music Shed—the dark-wood walls are covered with photographs of Sibelius, Bruch, and other legendary musicians who have played the room—will be the venue for the Yale Summer School of Music's last full weekend of chamber music. Aug. 10 at 8: A distinguished trio—David Shifrin on clarinet, André-Michel Schub on piano, and Ani Kavafian doubling on violin and viola—offers major works by Mozart (the "Kegelstatt" Trio), Poulenc, Fauré, and Bartók ("Contrasts"). ♦ Aug. 11 at 8: The Tokyo String Quartet celebrates its thirtieth season at Norfolk with a concert of music by Toshio Hosokawa ("Blossoming," a U.S. première), Beethoven (the "Harp" Quartet), and Brahms (the String Quintet in F Major, with the violist Koichiro Harada). (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000.)

MARLBORO MUSIC FESTIVAL
The final weekend of this renowned festival brings concerts of chamber music by some of the world's most distinguished musicians (including the pianists Richard Goode and Mitsuko Uchida) and their phenomenally talented protégés. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. Aug. 10-11 at 8:30 and Aug. 12 at 2:30. Programs are announced one week in advance at www.marlboromusic.org.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
Aug. 11 at 6: Two elegant and incisive players, the violinist Livia Sohn and the pianist Natalie Zhu, offer a concert of "Nocturnal Sonatas" that features works by Mozart and Grieg (the Sonata No. 3 in C Minor) and the Northeast première of Russell Platt's "Autumn Sonata" (2004-05). ♦ Aug. 12 at 3: The Shanghai Quartet brings its polished intensity to quartets by Mendelssohn and Schubert (No. 14, "Death and the Maiden"), with a work by the respected Chinese-American composer Zhou Long as a prelude. (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

WINDHAM CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The bucolic Catskills will be rocked by the raucous yet carefully calibrated sounds of the avant-garde string quartet Ethel, which offers a program of music by such downtown luminaries as Don Byron ("Four Thoughts on Marvin Gaye") and John King, as well as works by the musicians themselves. (Windham, N.Y. 518-678-9309. Aug. 11 at 8.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
Two distinctive veterans—the flutist Eugenia Zukerman and the guitarist David Starobin—join the Bergonzi String Quartet in a piquant program of works by Villa-Lobos, Ibert, Glière (the String Quartet No. 2), and Schubert at the longtime festival's air-conditioned Gordon Hall. (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 12 at 3.)

MOVIES OPENING

CROSSING THE LINE
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 10. (Cinema Village.)

DADDY DAY CAMP
In this sequel, two fathers (Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Paul Rae) try to run a summer camp. Directed by Fred Savage. Opening Aug. 8. (In wide release.)

DANS PARIS
In this drama, directed by Christophe Honoré, a lovelorn young man (Romain Duris) is coaxed back to action by his brother (Louis Garrel). In French. Opening Aug. 8. (IFC Center.)

DESCENT
A drama, directed by Talia Lugacy, about a woman (Rosario Dawson) who seeks vengeance after a sexual assault. Opening Aug. 10. (Village East Cinemas.)

ROCKET SCIENCE
In this teen comedy, directed by Jeffrey Blitz, a boy who stutters (Reece Daniel Thompson) joins the high-school debate team to impress a girl. Opening Aug. 10. (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)

RUSH HOUR 3
The next installment, set in Paris, directed by Brett Ratner and starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker. Co-starring Max von Sydow, Yvan Attal, and Roman Polanski. Opening Aug. 10. (In wide release.)

STARDUST
A fantasy, adapted from a novel by Neil Gaiman, about a young man who promises to bring the woman he loves a fallen star. Directed by Matthew Vaughn; starring Charlie Cox, Claire Danes, and Peter O'Toole. Opening Aug. 10. (In wide release.)

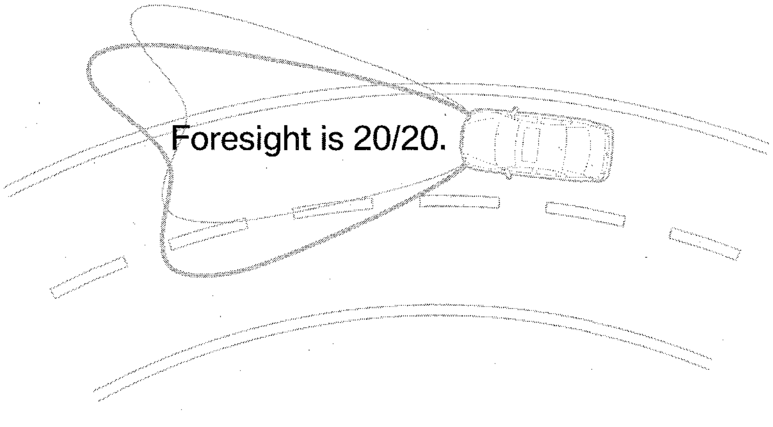
2 DAYS IN PARIS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 10. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

BECOMING JANE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM
Matt Damon, looking more like a bullet than ever—short hair, blunt nose, no stubble—returns as the out-in-the-cold C.I.A. agent Jason Bourne, who carried out illegal assassinations for the agency, which now wants to get rid of him. As before, agency powers sit at a bank of computers tracking Bourne (who may be a thousand miles away) while he tries to evade their gaze as well as the goons, some working for the C.I.A. and some not, who want to kill him. Eventually, he gets himself in a position to survey the surveyors and hunt the hunters, but all he wants is the return of his identity, which was filched from him during his training. The director, Paul Greengrass (who also made the second film in the series, "The Bourne Supremacy"), composes the movie in tiny fragments, but we see what we need to see, and the result is pretty nearly always thrilling. Some of the chase sequences go on for as long as ten minutes. With David Strathairn and Joan Allen as agency bigwigs. The screenplay, vaguely suggested by Robert Ludlum's novels, is credited to Tony Gilroy (who has worked on the entire series) and many other writers.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/6/07.) (In wide release.)

CROSSING THE LINE
Cherchez la femme: in 1962, James Joseph Dresnok, an American soldier stationed on the South Korea side of the demilitarized zone, snuck away from guard duty to visit a woman. Threatened with court-martial, he strolled through a minefield and defected to North Korea, where he has been living ever since. In 2004, the filmmaker Daniel Gordon, making his third documentary in North Korea, interviewed Dresnok and the family he made for himself there, and the story he gets is astonishing. An abandoned child, self-proclaimed "illiterate," and cuckolded husband, the young sad sack Dresnok went from being a capitalist nobody to a communist celebrity overnight, and he remains one to this day—thanks, in large part, to his role in "Nameless Heroes," a twenty-part film directed by Kim Jong Il, in which he plays an evil American called Arthur, the name by which North Korean strangers greet him on the street even now. The vertiginous play of ideology and identity and the sheer strangeness of Dresnok's experience (as well as that of three other American defectors who made a similar trip in the sixties) make this film absorbing; the glimpses of the North Korean way of life make it essential. In English and Korean.—*Richard Brody* (Cinema Village.)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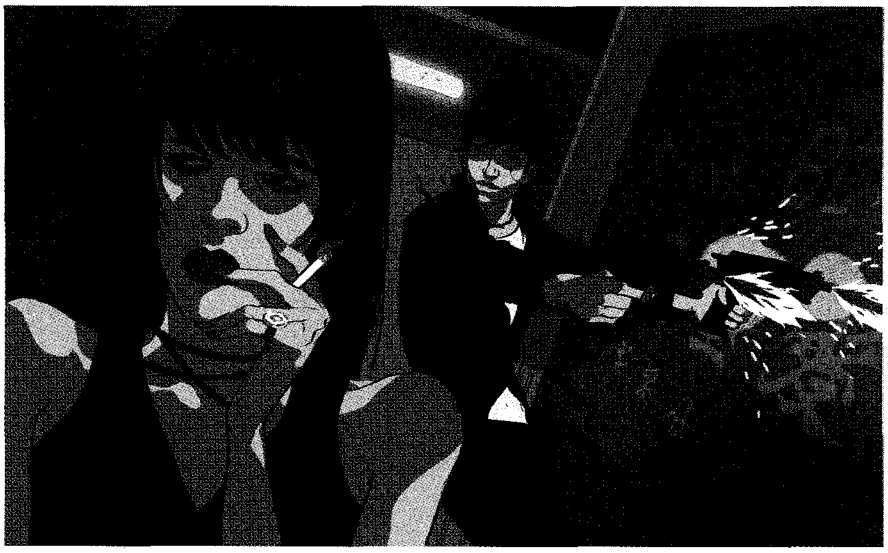
HAIRSPRAY

The movie version of the hit musical (itself based on John Waters's 1988 film) is perfectly pleasant but not as exhilarating as the show, which distilled our nostalgia for the candied period between Elvis's early work and the arrival of the Beatles. The director of the movie, Adam Shankman, and the screenwriter, Leslie Dixon, have removed the traces of camp and blue humor that gave the stage show its happily knowing flavor. As before, Tracy Turnblad (Nikki Blonsky), a chubby Baltimore teen-ager in 1962, lives to dance and to make out with the sweet, good-looking school king (Zac Efron), and much of the movie feels like a prolonged platter party. The dance numbers, however, are unimaginatively shot, and the idea of substituting John Travolta for Harvey Fierstein as Tracy's hefty mother, Edna (played by the outrageous Divine in Waters's original version), is a blandly earnest betrayal—Travolta gives a sincere, unfunny performance as a Baltimore housewife. With Michelle Pfeiffer in an amusing turn as the hypocritical shrew who manages a local TV station, and Christopher Walken, gruff and tender, as Tracy's father.—*D.D.* (7/23/07) (In wide release.)



Michelle Reis and Leon Lai in Wong Kar-Wai's "Fallen Angels," at BAM *Aug. 8-14.*

TOMER HANUKA

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

The fifth and longest of J. K. Rowling's fantasy books gets the shortest running time, in the director David Yates's economical take on the boy wizard. By focussing the story on Harry (a leaner and slightly meaner Daniel Radcliffe) and his exploits, Yates dispenses with many of the novel's subplots and is able to push the story forward, ominously foreshadowing the dark times to come. The cleanly delivered story line has the evil Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) gathering his henchmen to let loose his powers, while Harry tries to convince those around him that Voldemort is on the march. There are three great treats in this installment of the Potter franchise: Harry's first kiss; the ethereal Luna Lovegood (Evanna Lynch, who won the part in a contest and is extraordinarily good); and the horrid new Professor of the Dark Arts, Dolores Umbridge, played by Imelda Staunton, whose scene-stealing, fascinatingly nasty performance is among the best in the series.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

HOT ROD

A goofball action comedy from the sketch group Lonely Island (the "Saturday Night Live" regular Andy Samberg, Jorma Taccone, and the director Akiva Schaffer) and written by Pam Brady ("South Park"). Samberg stars as Rod, a small-town nerd who aspires to live up to the glorious career of the father he never knew, purportedly a stunt double for Evel Knievel. Rod has a crew—a meekly charming bunch of numbskulls (the lovable Taccone stands out)—and an old goat of a stepfather (gleefully played by Ian McShane), with whom he is in a perpetual showdown. The good-hearted, mildly ludicrous humor is held together by plenty of poorly executed stunts—Rod is, of course, an abysmal stuntman. The lovely Isla Fisher elevates her typically underwritten character (the girl) just by showing up, and the action scenes—an extended tumble down a mountain comes to mind—are occasionally pushed so far that they're actually funny.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU CHUCK AND LARRY

This ribald but sentimental comedy, about a pair of rough-hewn Brooklyn firefighters, is "Brokeback Mountain" for the "Jackass" demographic. Bureaucratic fine print requires Larry Valentine (Kevin James), the widowed father of two young children, to find a new insurance beneficiary through marriage, and the only person he trusts is his colleague and best friend, Chuck Levine (Adam Sandler), a notorious ladies' man. Through a series of mishaps, their civil union becomes tabloid fodder—and, to their surprise, an inspiration to gay men everywhere. The result is a heartfelt yet painfully sincere liberal social-problem film that offers a ringing endorsement of gay marriage but, playing to its target audience, avoids any hint of gay sex.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

MOLIÈRE

A bio-pic about the playwright, the details of whose life are surprisingly sparse; whole years are unaccounted for in the historical record, which gives the director, Laurent Tirard, considerable license in laying out a series of imaginary escapades. Molière (Romain Duris), the leading light of a failing theatrical troupe, is hired on a whim by a rich fool (Fabrice Luchini), who needs help composing an aphrodisiac play. The fool has a wife (Laura Morante), with whom the playwright—disguised as a priest—falls in love. And so the complications abound, the idea being that Molière was inspired by actual shenanigans to compose his great farces of later years. Sadly, the film itself is not funny, being far too stolid for either raucousness or grace, and the thuggish Duris, ideal for gloomier fare, is wholly miscast as a wellspring of human comedy. Only Morante and the nimble Luchini leaven the mood. In French.—*Anthony Lane* (7/30/07) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

NO END IN SIGHT

The best documentary on the Iraq occupation made so far. This modest, attentive, and outraged collection of interviews, news footage, and narrated history gathers weight and strength and delivers, in chronological order, an overwhelming pattern of folly: In the run-up to the 2003 invasion and in the months immediately after it, all the people who knew anything about Iraq and the Middle East—those who had serious experience in military, intelligence, or reconstruction work—were thrown out and replaced by ignorant ideologues who refused to take advice. The movie may not offer much that's new factually, but it provides what can only be called sensuous rewards—we need to see how badly Baghdad and Fallujah have been torn up, and we need to see and hear the losers in the policy wars (including former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Colonel Paul Hughes, and General Jay Garner), who, despite getting things right, now feel guilty that they couldn't do more to prevent the disaster. Written and directed by Charles Ferguson with steady intelligence and cumulative force.—*D.D.* (8/6/07) (Film Forum.)

POLICE

In Maurice Pialat's astringently naturalistic drama, from 1985, Gérard Depardieu, as the Parisian detective Louis Mangin, exuberantly careens through the station house and the city at large as his self-confident swagger, hypersensitive bullshit meter, and inflated sense of entitlement give rise to venomous effusions of racism, sexism, brutality, and indifference to the fine points of law. The plot is set in motion by the arrest of one of a band of North African drug dealers (Jonathan Leïna) and his girlfriend, Noria (Sophie Marceau), who works with them and, when it suits her fancy, against them. After taking up with their fast-talking, sarcastic lawyer (Richard Anconina)—Mangin's best friend—she throws herself at the detective, who loses his head and his bearings. Working from a story by the director Catherine Breillat, Pialat brings to life a teeming, high-relief throng of characters, including a cold, brilliant schlub of a crime boss, an old turnkey whose heart and mind are still in the wartime rice paddies of Vietnam, and a fancy prostitute (Sandrine Bonnaire). In the welcome absence of movie music, Pialat adorns the soundtrack with a heavy-metal symphony: a revolver's spinning barrel, the clang of a cell door, the dead snap of locks, the jingle of keys, and the dull thud of a desk top when struck by a suspect's forehead. In French and Arabic.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; Aug. 14.)

RATATOUILLE

For Remy (Patton Oswalt), the restless rodent who is the leading figure in Pixar's brilliant new animation feature, the omnivore's dilemma can be solved only by eating well. Rejecting the usual rat's feast of garbage, Remy realizes that he needs to cook. Though "Ratatouille" starts out as a minor conceit about a rat who turns himself into a connoisseur, it becomes a gripping comic fable about the implacability of an artist. Washed into a sewer, Remy lands in Paris, where he makes himself known to a young man, Alfredo Linguini (Lou Romano), who has inherited a famous restaurant but cannot crack an egg. Quietly, he rides under Alfredo's toque and pulls tufts of his hair, controlling the young man's chopping and sauce-stirring techniques like a master puppeteer. Brad Bird's animation crew is good at so many things (for instance, the geography of the restaurant kitchen where much of the movie takes place) that one is released into the pleasures of the story and the details of culinary lore.—*D.D.* (7/23/07) (In wide release.)

REGENERATION

There is perhaps no cinematic view of slum life as shockingly squalid as the one on view in this 1915 drama, one of the first gangster films, made largely on location in New York. The director Raoul Walsh, who grew up in the city, infuses his first surviving feature with the raw street life of his youth and a colorful, disturbing array of broken-down, life-worn extras he recruited from saloons. The tale of an abused orphan's rise to gang leader takes a decisive turn when the gangster Owen Conway (Rockliffe Fellowes, a ringer for the young Brando) meets a frivolous socialite (Anna Q. Nilsson) who is slumming in a Bowery dive. The redemptive ending foretold in the title does little to dispel the air of grimness induced by the sight of cracked walls, ragged clothes, filthy tin buckets of beer, and ugly fistfights of a knockdown, drag-out inconclusiveness. Revelling in the cinema's power to set a vast scene in a single glance, Walsh gives the spare, schematic story a novelistic amplitude. Silent.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Aug. 13.)

RESCUE DAWN

Ten years ago, Werner Herzog made an extraordinary documentary called "Little Dieter Needs to Fly." This recounted the exploits of Dieter Dengler, a German-born pilot in the U.S. Navy, who was shot down on a secret mission over Laos in 1966, imprisoned in the jungle for many months, and finally, after an audacious breakout, picked up and brought back to safety. Now Herzog retells the tale as a feature film, starring Christian Bale—first chipper, then cadaverous—as the indestructible Dengler. Many of the highs and lows remain intact, including the hero's immersion in a well, the wooden stocks that were used to restrain him at night, and the eventual triumph of his return to the aircraft carrier from which he had set out. Yet the film lacks the hypnotic strangeness of the original, and the dramatized Dengler, however heroic his survival, feels like a watery imitation of the real thing. With Steve Zahn as Duane, a fellow-inmate of Dengler's; the highlight of the movie consists of the two starving men reciting fridgefuls of imaginary food.—*A.L.* (7/9 & 16/07) (In wide release.)

SICKO
In the beginning of Michael Moore's attack on America's health-care system, he records heartbreaking interviews with families who have been betrayed or neglected by H.M.O.s and insurance companies. But then Moore hauls off three ailing Ground Zero rescue workers and other seriously ill people to Guantánamo Bay, where the detainees allegedly get good (and free) health care. The sick Americans are turned away, of course, and the joke seems insensitive. Moore does find some help for the rescue workers in Havana (the other sick Americans mysteriously vanish), and the rest of the movie is devoted to the wonders of health care in Canada, England, and France as well as in Cuba. But Moore accepts what doctors and patients abroad say at face value—as a report on national health services in different countries, the movie is worthless—and he doesn't interview a single American who might have ideas about reforming our own system. Since the majority of Americans want some form of national health care, Moore, for once, seems behind the curve.—*D.D.* (7/2/07) (In wide release.)

THE SIMPSONS MOVIE
The incomparable gang at full length for the first time, with enough jokes, satire, nonsense, and sentiment to justify the eighty-eight minutes. Homer falls in love with a pig, interrupting the sadomasochistic bond between him and Bart, and pollutes Lake Springfield with pig doody (the family's home state, in case you were wondering, borders on Maine and Kentucky). As a result, President Schwarzenegger quarantines the town, prompting the locals to drive the Simpsons to Alaska, where Homer has mystical visions with the help of a befurred Inuit woman. Written by the show's creators, Matt Groening and James L. Brooks, among many others. Directed by David Silverman.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

SUNSHINE
The British director Danny Boyle has energy to burn, but the effects are most ardent and spectacular when he stays close to home—witness "Trainspotting" and "28 Days Later," set in Scotland and London, respectively. When he drifts away, as in "The Beach" and "A Life Less Ordinary," much of that verve declines. Now he has left Earth altogether, with mixed results. A crew of astronauts is sent to administer a nuclear kick-start to our dying sun. The mission, like the film, falters as they veer from their appointed course to dock with a sister ship: a lunatic risk, as anybody could have told them, leading to fire, murder, suicide, bodily evaporation, and other unhealthy results. Logic is lost in space, the clarity of the buildup is squandered, and the climax of the film, however ravishing, becomes a blur of mystical confusion. With Cillian Murphy as a blue-eyed physicist and Michelle Yeoh as an interplanetary gardener.—*A.L.* (7/30/07) (In wide release.)

WOMAN IN THE DUNES
Hiroshi Teshigahara's erotic parable, from 1964, belongs to the genre of weird-seduction fiction. The residents of an isolated seaside hamlet force an amateur entomologist (Eiji Okada) from Tokyo into becoming the helper—and mate—of a Sisyphus-like woman (Kyoko Kishida) who lives in an inaccessible pit between towering dunes. The two shovel the sand out of her bunker every night and send it up a rope the next day. Freed from urban constraints, the man grows to find their oppressive existence honest, even liberating. Kobo Abé wrote this adaptation of his 1960 novel, and it shows you what once led John Updike to state that Abé's no-exit situations make for "cheap suspense" and "readerly exasperation." But the film's harsh sensualism transcends the irritations of the plot. Teshigahara has a talent for spare, stylized imagery: in some scenes flesh takes on the pulsating currents of the dunes, the wind, and the sea. When the man and woman stroke the sand off each other, they are undressing already naked bodies. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow* (IFC Center; Aug. 10-12.)

Also Playing

BRATZ: In wide release. **EL CANTANTE:** In wide release. **NO RESERVATIONS:** In wide release. **THE TEN:** In limited release. **UNDERDOG:** In wide release. **THE WILLOW TREE:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Pedro Costa. Aug. 8 at 7: "Sicilia!" (1996, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 8 at 9:30: "Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?" (2001; in French and Italian). ♦ Aug. 9 at 6:15: "In Vanda's Room" (2000; in Portuguese). ♦ Aug. 9 at 9:30: "Down to Earth" (1994; in Portuguese). ♦ Special screening. Aug. 11 at 7: "Urban Peasants" (1975, Ken Jacobs). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Aug. 12 at 5:30: "A Sixth of the World" (1926, Dziga Vertov; silent). ♦ Aug. 12 at 7: "Forward, Soviet!" (1925-26, Vertov; silent).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In revival. Aug. 8-9 and Aug. 13-14 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15 and Aug. 10-12 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Fallen Angels" (1995, Wong Kar-Wai; in Cantonese).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"NYC Noir." Aug. 8 at 1, 4:35, and 7:50: "The Naked City" (1948, Jules Dassin). ♦ Aug. 8 at 2:50, 6:15, and 9:40: "Force of Evil" (1948, Abraham Polonsky). ♦ Aug. 9 at 1, 5:20, and 9:40: "The Tattooed Stranger" (1950, Edward J. Montagne). ♦ Aug. 9 at 2:20 and 6:40: "Cop Hater" (1958, William A. Berke). ♦ Aug. 9 at 3:50 and 8:10: "Blast of Silence" (1960, Allen Baron). ♦ Aug. 10-11 at 1:30, 4:10, 7, and 9:35: "Rosemary's Baby" (1968, Roman Polanski). ♦ Aug. 12 at 1:30, 5:45, and 10 and Aug. 13 at 3:10: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Aug. 12 at 3:35 and 7:50 and Aug. 13 at 1 and 5:15: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Scorsese). ♦ Aug. 13 at 7:30: "Regeneration" (†) and "Musketeers of Pig Alley" (1912, D. W. Griffith; silent). ♦ Aug. 13 at 8:50: "The Docks of New York" (1928, Josef von Sternberg; silent). ♦ Aug. 14 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "The Dark Corner" (1946, Henry Hathaway). ♦ Aug. 14 at 2:55, 6:35, and 10:15: "The House on 92nd Street" (1945, Hathaway).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Aug. 10-12 at noon: "Woman in the Dunes" (†). ♦ "Waverly Midnights: Remembering James Lyons." Aug. 10-11: "Safe" (1995, Todd Haynes). ♦ Special screening. Aug. 13 at 7: "Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars" (2007, Banker White and Zach Niles), with a live performance by the band.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Rialto Pictures: Reviving Classic Cinema." Except where noted, all films are in French. Aug. 8 at 6 and Aug. 10 at 8:30: "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1964, Luis Buñuel). ♦ Aug. 9 at 6: "Classe Tous Risques" (1960, Claude Sautet). ♦ Aug. 9 at 8:30: "Murderous Maids" (2000, Jean-Pierre Denis). ♦ Aug. 10 at 6: "Nights of Cabiria" (1957, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ "Jean Desmet's Cinema of Sensation and Sentiment," a silent-film series. Aug. 11 at 2: "A Welcome Intruder" (1913, D. W. Griffith) and "Terra Promessa" (1913, Baldassare Negroni). ♦

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Aug. 11 at 4:30: "Jack" (1913, André Liabel) and short films. ♦ Aug. 11 at 7: "Ivanhoe" (1913, Herbert Brenon). ♦ Aug. 13 at 6: "Das Recht aufs Dasein" (1913, Joseph Delmont), "Bout-de-Zan et le Crime au Téléphone" (1914, Louis Feuillade), and "The Chest of Fortune" (1914, Keneal Buel). ♦ Aug. 13 at 8: "The Streets of New York" (1913, Travers Vale), "Speed Demon" (1912, Mack Sennett), and "Kri-Kri e Lea Militari" (1913, director unknown). ♦ "MOMA Laffs," a comedy series. Aug. 12 at 2: "Born Yesterday" (1950, George Cukor). ♦ Aug. 12 at 4:30: "It Should Happen to You" (1954, Cukor).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screenings. Aug. 10 at 7:30: "Devdas" (2002, Sanjay Leela Bhansali; in Hindi and Bengali), introduced by the author Anu Chopra. ♦ Aug. 12 at 3: "The King of Kong" (2007, Seth Gordon), introduced by the director, the producer, Ed Cunningham, and the video-game champion Steve Wiebe. ♦ Through Sept. 2: "Uneasy Riders: American Film in the Nixon Years, 1970-1974." Aug. 11 at 3: "The King of Marvin Gardens" (1972, Bob Rafelson). ♦ Aug. 11 at 5:30: "The Last Detail" (1973, Hal Ashby).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Garbo & Dietrich: Screen Goddesses." Aug. 11-12 at 6: "Dishonored" (1931, Josef von Sternberg). Aug. 11-12 at 7:45: "Mata Hari" (1931, George Fitzmaurice).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—The films of Gérard Depardieu. Except where noted, all films are in French. Aug. 8 at 6:15: "Barocco" (1976, André Téchiné). ♦ Aug. 8 at 8:30, Aug. 10 at 6:15, and Aug. 11 at 2: "Buffet Froid" (1979, Bertrand Blier). ♦ Aug. 10 at 8:15: "Get Out Your Handkerchiefs" (1978, Blier). ♦ Aug. 11 and Aug. 13 at 4 and Aug. 12 at 8:30: "Loulou" (1980, Maurice Pialat). ♦ Aug. 11 at 6 and Aug. 13 at 1:45 and 6:15: "The Woman Next Door" (1981, François Truffaut). ♦ Aug. 11 at 8:10, Aug. 12 at 5:45, and Aug. 14 at 1:30: "The Last Metro" (1980, Truffaut). ♦ Aug. 12 at 1: "Danton" (1983, Andrzej Wajda). ♦ Aug. 12 at 3:45 and Aug. 13 at 8:30: "I Want to Go Home" (1989, Alain Resnais; in French and English). ♦ Aug. 14 at 4:15 and 9: "Police" (†). ♦ Aug. 14 at 6:30: "Mon Oncle d'Amérique" (1980, Resnais).

READINGS AND TALKS

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
The novelist Kevin Baker, the biographer Lee Lowenfish, the baseball historian John Thorn, and the sportswriter Alan Schwarz discuss baseball in New York City, in conjunction with the museum's show "Glory Days: New York Baseball 1947-1957." (Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. Aug. 14 at 6:30. For reservations, which are required, call 212-534-1672, ext. 3395.)

"WORD FOR WORD"
The al-fresco reading series in Bryant Park turns to poetry, with appearances by Katie Ford, Evie Shockley, and Mónica de la Torre. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-768-4242. Aug. 14 at 6:30.)

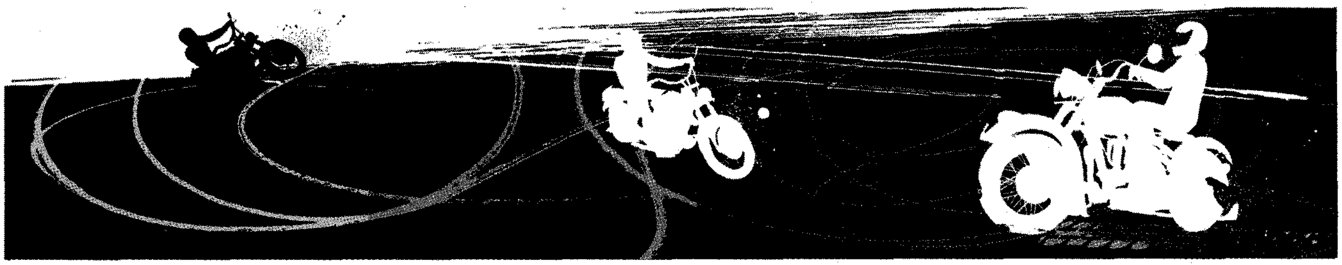
STRAND BOOKSTORE
The poet and novelist Carol Muske-Dukes reads from her new novel, "Channeling Mark Twain." (Broadway at 12th St. Aug. 14 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

THE CORNER BOOKSTORE
Dan Brown started his teaching career in the Bronx at P.S. 85 when he was twenty-two years old. On Aug. 16 at 6, he reads from "The Great Expectations School: A Rookie Year in the New Blackboard Jungle," his account of those days. (Madison Ave. at 93rd St. For reservations, call 212-831-3554.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"ART CAN BE ANYTHING"
The writer and actor Tanya Selvaratnam, who has appeared in productions by such multimedia theatre companies as the Builders Association and the Wooster Group, curates a multisensory evening. She will read from "Paradise, Paradox," her collection of short stories and poems contrasting Sri Lanka and Las Vegas, and present "Profound Contempt," her performance piece about Einstein and the exotic dancer and spy Mata Hari. Music will be provided by the Scottish-born singer Angela McCluskey, the choreographer and Frankfurt Ballet alum Francesca Harper will dance, the writers and performers Winsome Brown and Honor Molloy will read new work, and Jennifer Todd Reeves's short film "Shadows Choose Their Horrors" will be screened. (Issue Project Room, 232 3rd St., at Third Ave., Brooklyn, 3rd fl. 718-330-0313. Aug. 8 at 8.)

MELVILLE DAY
The South Street Seaport Museum and Friends of Hudson River Park celebrate the life and work of Herman Melville, whose hundred-and-eighty-eighth birthday was August 1, with a dramatic reading in Hudson River Park, a boat ride around the tip of Manhattan, a walking tour of the seaport district, a lecture by the Melville scholar Don Yanella, and a reception aboard the tall ship Peking. (For more information, call 212-748-8786, or visit www.southstreetseaportmuseum.org. Aug. 11, starting at noon.)



Work by Aaron Young, at the Seventh Regiment Armory.

ULLA PUGGAARD

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
ORAL FIXATIONS
Aug. 22–Sept. 4

A new constellation of American independent filmmakers has emerged in recent years with low-key, intimate movies about the meandering lives and endless conversations of young people, sometimes played by the filmmakers themselves. IFC's "The New Talkies: Generation DIY" highlights films by Andrew Bujalski, Joe Swanberg, and others from the movement, which has been dubbed "mumblecore." (212-924-7771.)

THE THEATRE
KINGDOM COME
Sept. 6–30

In a double bill presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company, "King Lear" and Chekhov's "The Seagull," both starring Sir Ian McKellen and directed by Sir Trevor Nunn, will play in repertory at BAM. (718-636-4100.)

NIGHT LIFE
HOMEGROWN
Sept. 9

This year, the charity concert known as Farm Aid sprouts in New York City, as Willie Nelson, Neil Young, John Mellencamp, Dave Matthews, and other artists visit Randall's Island. For the first time in the series' twenty-two year history, the concessions will feature organic, locally grown food. (www.farmaid.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
THE LOVED ONE
Sept. 11–29

The current American rage for "book club" opera embraces both current and classic writers. City Opera presents Richard Danielpour's opera "Margaret Garner," the composer's first, which features a libretto by Toni Morrison based on the heartrending story of the slave woman who inspired her novel "Beloved." (212-721-6500.)

ART
FULL CYCLE
Sept. 18–23

Action painting will pop a wheelie at the Seventh Regiment Armory, when the New York artist Aaron Young sets ten motorcyclists loose on sixty thousand square feet of black painted floor. The tire tracks will burn through the black, revealing fluorescent layers of pink, red, and yellow below. (212-636-3930.)

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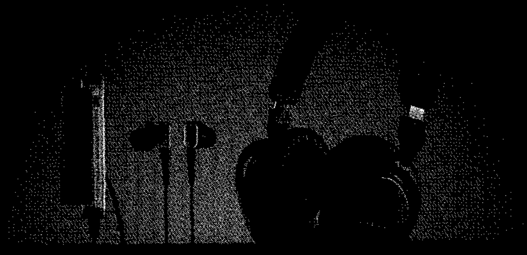

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
READ ALL ABOUT IT

When there's big news, the main story on the *Wall Street Journal's* front page usually starts with a short, ringing sentence, such as the one that appeared last Wednesday: "A century of Bancroft-family ownership at Dow Jones & Co. is over." On the left side of the page that day was another signature motif: an in-depth reconstruction of how Rupert Murdoch had triumphed in his four-month campaign to buy the company and the newspaper it owned—the *Journal*, one of the best papers in the world. The story was gang-tackled by six reporters and came furnished with the *Journal's* mandatory scenes of business titans with murky motives negotiating in restaurants. The writers referred to their own company's chief executive as Murdoch's "dance partner," and noted, on the front page, the possibility of a "big payday" for the boss following the sale.

In all, the *Journal's* coverage of the sale was a kind of prideful and impressive demonstration to Murdoch of the values, the talents, and the daring of the editors and reporters he will now have on his payroll. The subliminal question that the coverage seemed to ask was, Will Murdoch destroy the *Journal*? Will he undermine the paper's values and call that "investment"?

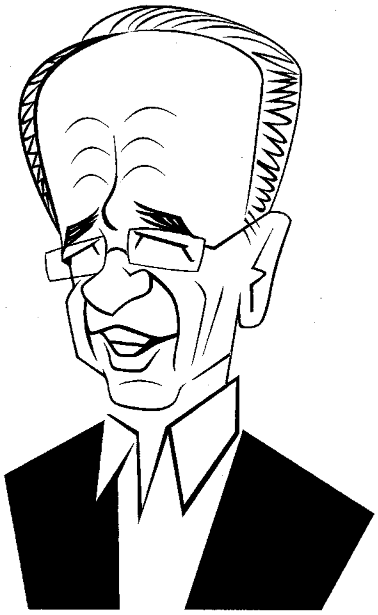
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT RISKO

Many journalists, including some in the *Journal's* newsroom, assume that Murdoch's victory will lead eventually to the paper's diminishment. In a sense, Murdoch has said as much. He favors what he calls "popular journalism." He has mentioned that he finds long stories about complicated subjects to be rather trying. At his numerous other properties (which include the *Post*, the London *Times*, and the Fox network), he has no record of funding the relentless, risk-taking investigative reporting in which the *Journal* has specialized.

There can be little doubt that a Murdoch-owned *Journal* will be different, and that some of the changes will amount to loss. Murdoch has voiced skepticism, for example, about the *Journal's* peculiar front-page feature stories known as "A-heds." In this hyperlinked era of multimedia, the A-hed is an almost atavistic institution that relies upon wit and originality but offers no pressing connection to the news of the day. This was the headline stack on one classic:

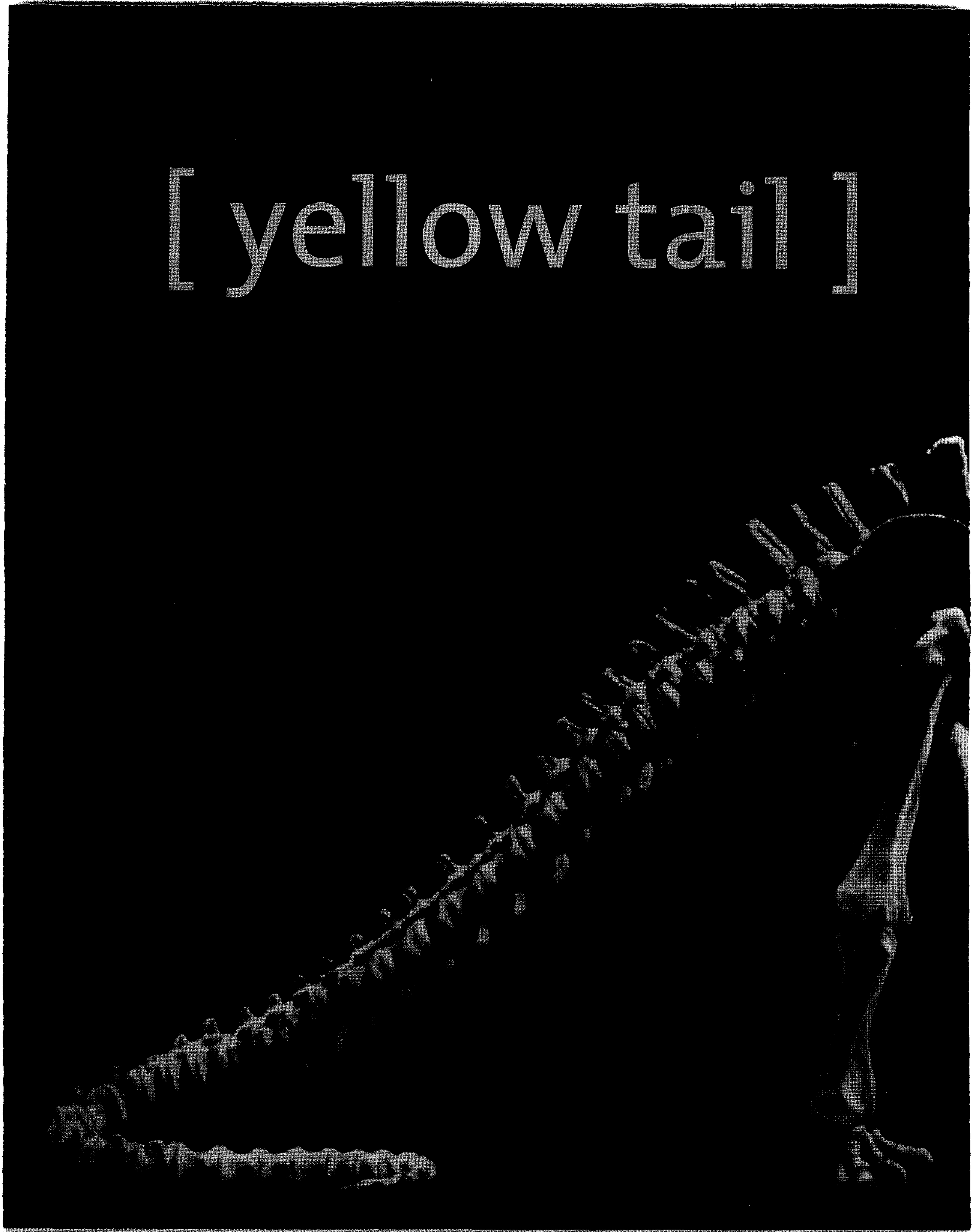
> Listening to Prozac:
> 'Bow Wow! I Really
> Love the Mailman!'
> *Some Are Pushing the Drug*
> *To Treat Pet Ailments;*
> *Scientologists Are Yelping*

It would not be entirely fair to blame Murdoch for the prospective vanishing of such compositions, though—and perhaps, since they sometimes concern drug-addled animals, he will change his view.



Nor can it be considered a surprise that Murdoch succeeded in his quest to buy the *Journal*. At seventy-six, he is apparently still juiced by the adrenaline that flows from empire creation. He prepared his bid skillfully; he offered a high price in cash for a troubled company; and he had no competitors. The newspapers that Murdoch publishes and the television networks that he operates may be coarse, lacking in public-minded ambition, and craven about their owner's political and business interests. None of this, however, disqualifies him from throwing money around as he pleases in a democratic marketplace.

The more regrettable aspect of the deal involves the sellers, the Bancroft family. The same civic marketplace that granted permission to Murdoch demanded responsibility from them. Over time, the Bancrofts failed their newspaper—not so much because they sold out as because



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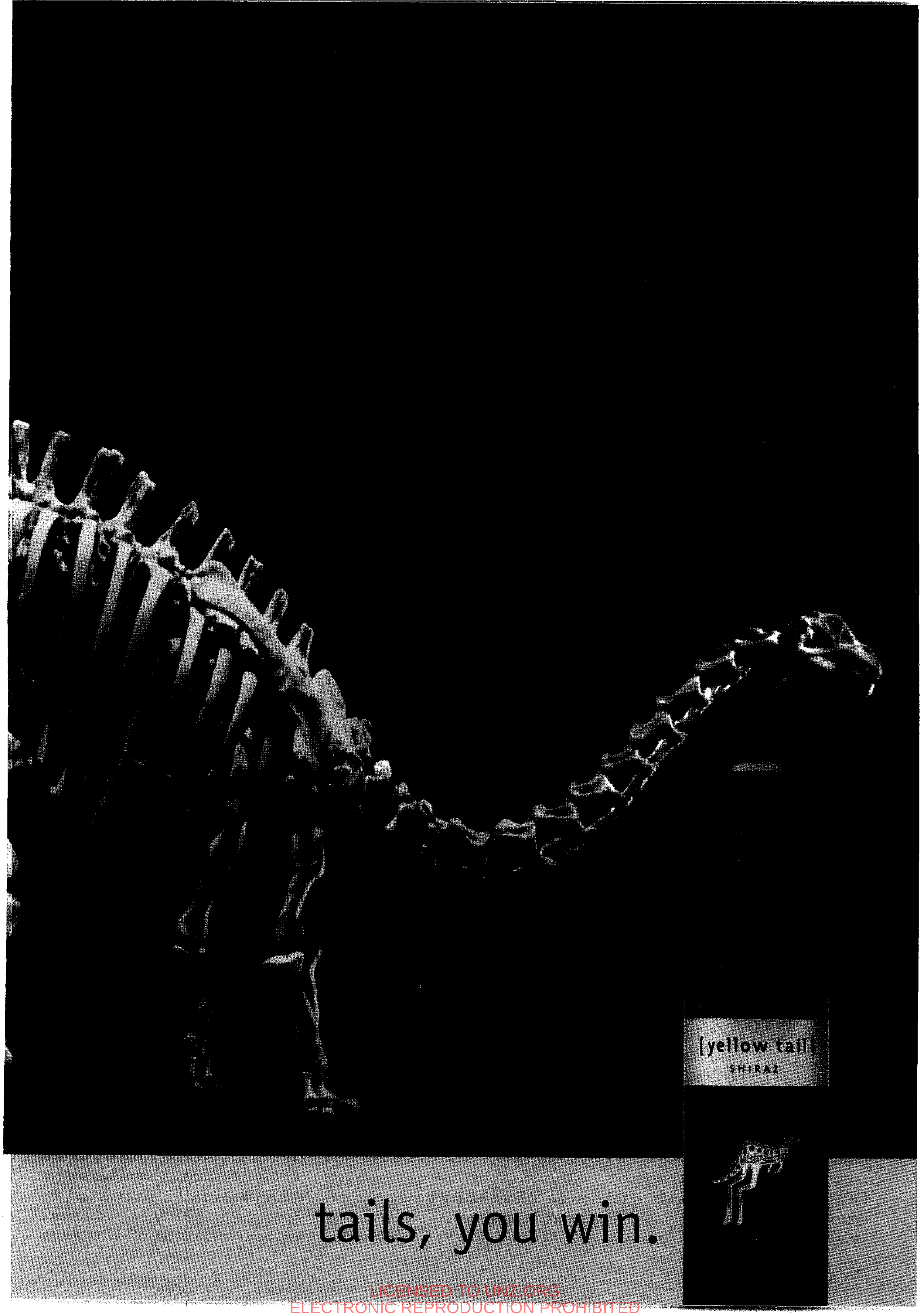
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tails, you win.

they did not prevent the conditions that made Murdoch's offer irrefutable. Their values may have been the right ones, but as a collective they lost focus, lacked vigor, and, in the end, could not resist the blandishments of a cunning suitor.

A decade ago, four American families regarded themselves, correctly, as guardians of public trusts, because they controlled independent newspapers, situated in America's most influential cities, that were vital to the national discourse. They were the Sulzbergers, who control the *Times;* the Grahams, who control the Washington *Post;* the Chandlers, who controlled the Los Angeles *Times;* and the Bancrofts. Within their separate ranks, the families faced a common challenge: as generations passed and ownership became dispersed among siblings and cousins, it grew harder to act decisively. The Sulzbergers and the Grahams handled the problem by empowering a single leader; the Chandlers did the same for a time, but then fell apart; the Bancrofts never addressed it.

Defiant statements about civic duty issued by members of the Bancroft family during the struggle with Murdoch have made it plain that some of them had a rich awareness of their public role, and were prepared to make financial sacrifices to preserve the company's independence. But the Bancrofts failed because they proved incompetent in the sphere that belonged to them as owners. This involved the adaptation of their inherited newspaper business model to support deep and independent reporting in the digital age.

The urgency of this mission has been clear since at least the mid-nineteen-nineties. As newspaper circulation fell, computing and telecommunications merged, and the Internet arrived with all the subtlety of a supernova. The business readers and the financial-market participants crucial to Dow Jones lived and worked at the forefront of these changes. Yet for years the Bancrofts coddled a chief executive at Dow Jones, Peter R. Kann, who, although he was a likable man and a talented journalist, could not find a winning strategic path.

As the Bancrofts dozed and Kann floundered, Michael Bloomberg erected a skyscraper of a company on Dow Jones's front lawn. He did this by pioneering the use of new technologies to profitably speed up and deliver business information. Dow Jones might have recovered from any number of mistakes, but it could not overcome its failure to dominate the profitable sale of electronic financial data. This ultimately laid the company bare for Murdoch, a master of technological change. Crawford Hill, a member of the Bancroft family who works as a biology teacher, summed up this background acutely in an e-mail to others in the family, reported last week by the *Journal:* "We are actually now paying the price for our passivity over the past twenty-five years."

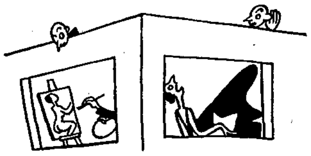
No railroad family could forestall the automobile, and no newspaper family can prevent the eventual end of newspapers in their old, accustomed form. Reporting without fear or favor arose from newspapers but is not inherently tied to them or even to the search for a well-turned sentence. Most of what matters about the coming media age is already being decided outside of traditional newsrooms, on YouTube and countless other Web sites, or in the advertising agencies that calibrate Google search results with the mouse-clicking habits of young consumers. Perhaps Google or its ilk will find it profitable or desirable to fund independent, expert foreign correspondence; or to support investigations of corporate and government power; or to train the sort of journalists who feel free to call out their employers' pay packages on the proverbial front page, although there are no signs of this yet. Or perhaps the Sulzbergers and the Grahams can adapt their public trusts successfully to the new technologies. And even if their efforts fail to become profitable these families might still preserve their newsrooms' independence by converting them into nonprofit foundations, similar to what the Poynter family did with the St. Petersburg *Times*, in Florida.

The tenets and the traditions of unfettered journalism are marrow in our constitutional system. The *Journal* matters most of all because it has been a rare American incubator of the values and the skills necessary to carry out independent reporting, and because the newspaper has continually demonstrated through its stories how the First Amendment is supposed to work. Rupert Murdoch's vanquishing of the Bancrofts reminds us that even small outposts of besieged values are worth fighting for if the alternative may be their extinction.

—*Steve Coll*

ROOTS

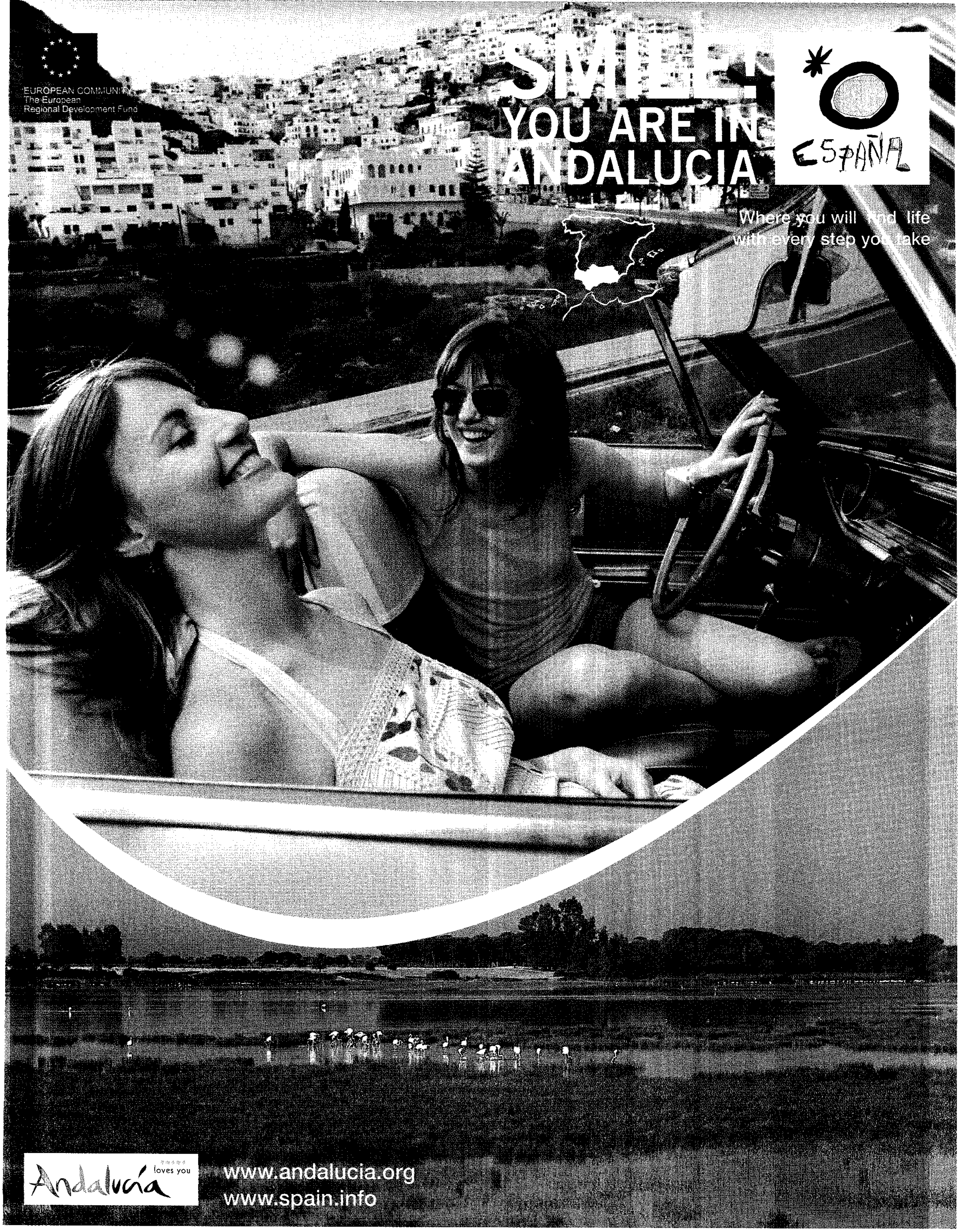
HOME AT CARNEGIE HALL



For twenty-two years, the photographer Josef Astor (no relation) has had a studio above the stage at Carnegie Hall. It's on the eighth floor, although technically the eighth is below the seventh; to get to it you take an elevator to six and walk up half a flight of stairs. The Carnegie Hall Studio Towers, as these quarters over the concert hall are known, contain many such oddities, but they also harbor one Manhattan commonplace: a band of artist-occupants whose tenancy is venerable, tenuous, and probably doomed.

Astor is one of the leaders of the tenants' association, which is fighting the landlord, the Carnegie Hall Corporation, which wants them all out. It intends to gut the building and make space for its own offices and programs. It has recently commenced eviction proceedings. The fifty or so artists who occupy the studios—most of them have been here for decades—contend that a provision in the lease between the corporation and the city, which owns the property, guarantees their right to stay.

Astor's studio, with creaky wood floors, faces north; the indirect light, from a giant skylight, twenty feet overhead, is ideal for photography and painting. There is a balcony, with room for a bed, and a kitchenette. Last Wednesday, he'd arranged a dozen chairs—no one like the other—in a circle, in anticipation of a meeting, that evening, between some tenants, their lawyer (a woman named Ms. Boop), and local politicians, whose vaguely articulated sympathies they hoped to convert into tactical support. A Senegal parrot named Zoltan flew freely about the place. Astor ticked off the names of some of the studios' former residents (Isadora Duncan, Agnes de Mille, Leonard Bernstein, Marlon Brando, Norman Mailer) and current ones (such as the ninety-five-year-old photographer Editta Sherman, known as the Duchess of Carnegie Hall, and the *Times* photographer Bill Cunningham, seen occasionally in the hall on his way to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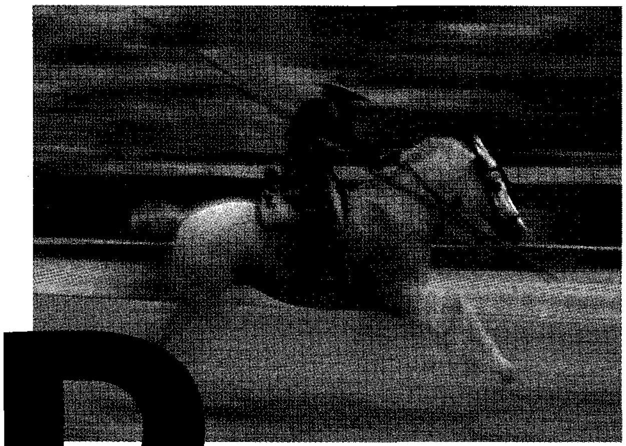
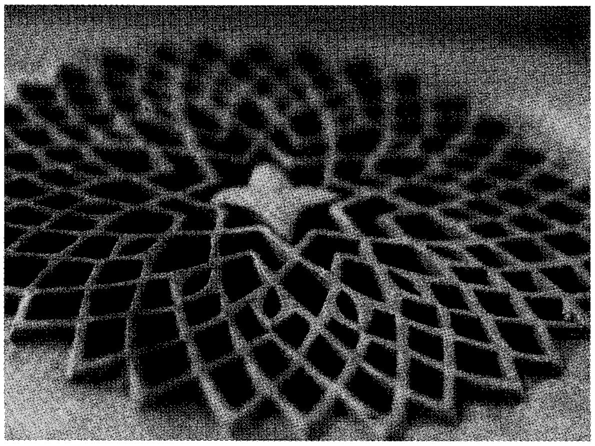
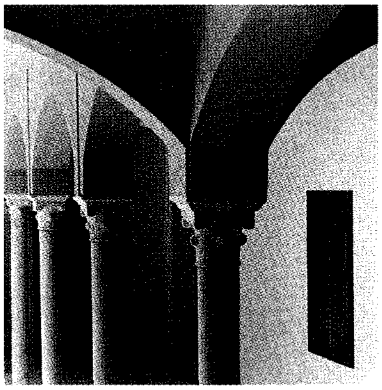




P*asso:* *Malagan Prodigy*

Long after Pablo Ruiz Picasso (1881-1973) moved to France, where he produced his twentieth-century masterpieces, he still referred to himself as a Malagueño, a reference to his roots in the Andalusian city of Málaga. This fall, Málaga, one of the oldest Mediterranean ports, shows its pride for its native son as it continues to honor Picasso's 125th anniversary with two important exhibitions and ongoing displays of his work.

In the heart of Málaga's historic district lies **Museo Picasso Málaga**, established in 2003 by the Autonomous Government of Andalucía, in conjunction with Picasso's daughter-in-law, Christine Ruiz-Picasso. The museum's collection features paintings, sculptures, and drawings by the artist, who is famous for distinctive periods of style and technique, from his blue period to his role in the development of Cubism.



"**Small Figure**" (through September 16th) is the first in a series of exhibitions designed to put the museum's collection into context. The show explores the historical and artistic significance of an African-influenced sculpture that Picasso created during a key phase in his artistic evolution. "**Picasso. Object and Image**" (October 22nd through January 2008) juxtaposes paintings, sculptures, drawings, and ceramics by the artist—ninety pieces in all—in order to examine the connection between the various means of artistic expression he employed in his work.

At the **Fundación Pablo Ruiz Picasso**, visitors can find out more about Picasso's early life at his childhood home, view an impressive collection of his art, and get a personal look at the man behind the public persona through memorabilia and family photographs. One of the pieces in the painting room, "Dreams and Lies of Franco," helped support Picasso's political affiliations: it was created for an International Exhibition in Paris as a way of raising funds for the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War.

Picasso lived in Málaga until he was about fifteen years of age, and today many landmarks in the city look very much the same as they did when he was a budding child-artist. **La Malagueta**, the bullring built in approximately 1876, is visible from **Castillo de Gibralfaro**, the Moorish castle that overlooks the city. Bullfighting was one of Picasso's passions and greatly influenced his later work. Other historic sights include **Alcazaba**, the Moorish fort; the **Catedral de la Encarnación**, built on the ruins of a mosque; and the old city center, with its maze of narrow, winding streets lined with shops, many dating to the early nineteen-hundreds.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HORSEMAN IN LA MALAGUETA, MÁLAGA'S BULLRING ©RAFAEL MARCHANTE/REUTERS/CORBIS; ARCHITECTURAL STAR DETAIL ON ALCAZABA, THE MOORISH FORT ©DAVID SANGER PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY; COURTYARD OF THE MUSEO PICASSO DE MÁLAGA ©ANA MULLER

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the showers) and evoked the days when the corridors were filled with the sounds of piano and clarinet.

Astor led a tour. The only music in the halls, on this afternoon, was the yowl and pop of saws and nail guns; some interregnal renovations were under way. One chamber, a rehearsal and recital space, had until a few years ago housed a giant pipe organ, in place of which there was now a contractor's boombox playing Madonna's "Holiday." Up on thirteen, Astor knocked on the door of the pianist Don Shirley, a resident for fifty of his eighty years. Slight and pop-eyed, Shirley, wearing slippers and a white Adidas tracksuit emblazoned with a yachting insignia, ushered Astor and a visitor into an impossibly high-ceilinged vault crammed with bric-a-brac—bell jars, glassware, statuary, Chinese lanterns, nautical paintings, a Buddha, a bottle of Chivas. "These are gifts from fans all over the world," he said. There was a concert grand in one corner, which had been damaged, he said, by a burst-pipe flood. He began to enumerate various grievances with the landlord, a recitation requiring him at one point to lead his guests through a cave of a bedroom ("The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" on two TVs) into his bathroom ("Fresh Prince" on one TV), where he told a complicated story about a giant bathtub and a cracked mirror, the upshot of which was his forbearance. Rent-control regulations require that the landlord, if it wants him gone, find him a "comparable" space nearby. "That's what I'm holding out for," he said, without having to note that no landlord, however beneficent, could ever turn up such a space.

Astor led the way up some stairs to the fourteenth floor, then across the building and down some more stairs to the eleventh, to a studio occupied by the writer and radio host Jonathan Schwartz, who was eating an avocado, under a framed print that read "AVOCADO." He'd been in the space since 1970, having inherited it from his father, the composer Arthur Schwartz. "I represent Carnegie Hall when I'm out in the world," he said. "I hope that's not presumptuous."

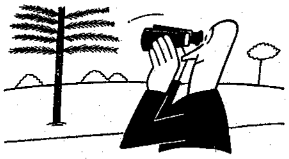
He lives here with his cat, Nelson (named after Nelson Riddle), and occasionally with his wife, whom he married in the building in 1984. The wedding was in Studio 906, which had belonged to Joe Raposo, who wrote music for "Sesame Street." Wilfrid Sheed and Jerzy Kosinski had been there. "The party spilled out onto the landing," he said. "We had a big glass bowl of caviar."

The studio, full of books, CDs, and not much else, gave rise to that old misguided desire for a prison sentence that would afford a man the time to catch up on his reading. "That's one of the points here," Schwartz said. "There are dozens of studios like this in the building that have, if not this essence, then another like it. It's not a conceit—it's a feeling. To dislodge us is insulting."

A few floors down was the studio of the poet Elizabeth Sargent. She had indicated to Astor that she did not want to be disturbed. This wish was granted. But she had given out her phone number and the hours when she was likely to be awake (3 A.M. to 2 P.M.), and, upon being called, she said, "I'm very reclusive but not on the phone." In anticipation of her tenancy's possible end, she had attempted to tidy up. "They kindly gave me the service of four big Dumpster things," she said. "I filled them all up." A believer in strong voices, she had taught her doctor how to speak from his abdomen, and in return he had offered to testify in court, if need be, that it would be disastrously stressful for her to leave her studio, after forty-two years there. "It's not the space one has," she said. "It's the time. And I can't tell you how much time I have here." She then began to recite, in a deep and hale voice, a poem from her 1963 book "The African Boy." It began, "We do not sing a mourning song without death." When she was done, she decreed that the caller sign off in Spanish. "*Hasta la vista.*" "*Hasta luego.*" *Click.*

—*Nick Paumgarten*

CLOSER LOOK DEPT.
BOTANISTS ON PARK

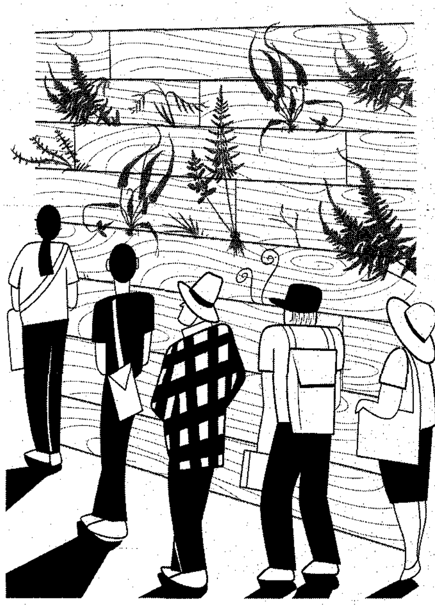


There is no end to the odd things that New Yorkers do on Saturday mornings. This, at least, is what drivers must have thought recently when they had to slow down to avoid a line of a dozen people flattened against the enormous embankment of the Park Avenue railroad trestle, peering with magnifying glasses and monoculars into tiny crevices in the stone. Passersby stared, asked questions, and even took photographs. Police officers stopped their patrol car and watched with suspicion, or with bewilderment—until they caught sight of the T-shirts many of us were wearing which bore slogans such as "American Fern Society" or "Ferns Are Ferntastic." We were assembled for a meeting of the American Fern Society, which had joined with the Torrey Botanical Society for a Saturday-morning Fern Foray. These forays, which have been going on for more than a century, are usually in somewhat more bucolic sites, but this time we had no goal beyond the Park Avenue viaduct, which, with its crevices and crumbling mortar, is a perfect place to see chink-finding, xerophytic ferns—ferns that, unlike most, can stand long periods of drying out and come to life again after a good rain.

The A.F.S. is a society of amateurs that was founded in Victorian times, an age of amateurs and naturalists. Darwin is our icon. We include a poet, two schoolteachers, a garage mechanic, a neurologist, a urologist, and assorted others. We are about equally divided by gender, and our ages vary from twenty to eighty. Besides us pteridophiles that morning, there was a young couple, two bryophiles, from the Torrey Botanical Society—a group of botanists and amateurs founded in the eighteen-sixties, just a few years before the A.F.S. They were "slumming" amongst the fern people: their interests lie more in mosses, liverworts, and lichens. Ferns are a bit too modern, too evolutionarily advanced, for them, just as flowering plants are for the rest of us.

One tends to think of ferns as delicate and moisture-loving, and many of them are. But others are among the toughest plants on the planet. Ferns will invariably be the first things to sprout, say, on a new lava flow. The planet's atmosphere is full of fern spores. *Woodsia obtusa*, the basic fern on the Park Avenue embankment, has sixty-four spores within each sporangium, and thousands of sporangia on the underside of the fronds of every plant, so each plant is good for a million spores, perhaps more. Let one of these land on a suitable place, and you see why ferns are the great opportunists of the plant world. Indeed, in the fossil record, there is something called the "fern spike," which shows how, after most of the world's plants and land animals were killed in the great extinction of the late Cretaceous era, life came bursting back in the form of ferns.

The leaders that morning were Michael Sundue, a young botanist and fern expert from the New York Botanical Garden, and Elisabeth Griggs, a botanical illustrator. We started on the west side of the trestle—it is shaded in the morning—and trekked up Park Avenue, facing the traffic. "Botanize at your own risk," the Fern Foray invitation had said.



"An ideal habitat for gametophytes," Sundue said. "Tiny rivulets of water creep down after a rain, dissolving the mortar, making an ideal medium for the lime-tolerant *Woodsia obtusa*." He discovered a tiny heart-shaped gametophyte in a bed of moss. It had no fronds, and looked nothing like a fern. It much more resembled, the bryological couple was happy to see, a liverwort—but it is a crucial intermediate stage in the fern's reproductive cycle. It has male and female organs on its surface, and when it is fertilized two tiny fronds, the new fern, will sprout from it. On an adult *Woodsia*, Sundue pointed out the tiny black umbrella-shaped structures, the indusia, that shelter the sporangia. When time comes for the sporangia to scatter their spores, they activate an ingenious catapult mechanism that flings the spores into the breeze. The spores will float, perhaps, for miles. And if they land somewhere moist and suitable they will grow into gametophytes, and the cycle will continue.

High above his head, Sundue spotted a gigantic *Woodsia* specimen, almost six feet across, clinging to the rock. "That one's a good age," he said. "Decades old—some species can be very long-lived." When he was asked if ferns show signs of age, he hesitated; the answer is not clear. A fern tends to keep growing, until it outruns its food supply, is ousted by competitors, or (as will happen sooner or later with the *Woodsia*) becomes so heavy that it falls to the ground. In some botanical gardens, there are massive ferns more than a hundred years old. Death is not built in to these plants as it is for us more specialized life forms, with the ticking clocks of our telomeres, our liability to mutations, our running-down metabolisms. But youth is apparent, even in ferns. The young *Woodsia* are charming: a bright spring green; tiny, like babies' toes; and very soft and vulnerable.

There was nothing but *Woodsia* between 103rd and 104th Streets, but moving to the next block we spotted a *Thelypteris palustris*, the marsh fern, here in a very unmarshy environment. It was perched in the wall about eight feet above the ground. Sundue, acrobatic, leaped up and pulled down a frond. We passed it around, peering at it through high-powered lenses and using Swiss Army knives to dissect its vascular bundles.

One of the group, an angiosperm lady from the Torrey Society, spotted a flowering plant near the *Thelypteris*. It was oozing with sticky white resin. *Lactuca*, she said, allied to lettuce. The word made me think back to my marine-biology days, and stimulated a sudden memory of *Ulva lactuca*, the edible seaweed that is often called sea lettuce. I thought, too, of the old word *lactucarium* (which the O.E.D. defines as "inspissated juice of various kinds of lettuce, used as a drug").

All these names are irresistible, and the next one seemed positively neurological: ebony spleenwort, *Asplenium platyneuron*, densely covered the trestle between 104th and 105th Streets. It used to be much rarer in this area, Sundue said, but now its range is spreading north and east. Sometimes plants migrate because a favorable habitat has been created. Rocks in New York tend to be acidic, hostile to these alkaline-loving ferns, although artificial structures made with mortar can provide a haven for lime-loving plants. But the great Park Avenue trestle goes back to the nineteenth century, long before the *Asplenium* is believed to have started spreading. Perhaps there is some local source of warmth (cities are full of unexpected heat islands), or perhaps it is yet another sign of global warming—perhaps both.

Between 105th and 106th Streets we found *Onoclea sensibilis*, the "sensitive fern." It looked very dry. It was not doing too well; solicitously, I gave it a drink from my water bottle. If I watered all the *Onocleas* here regularly, Sundue said, they would become the dominant fern species, and completely alter the ecology of the trestle.

Next came another splendidly named fern, *Pellaea atropurpurea*. Some of the plants, those in the densest shade, were a deep blue, almost indigo, verging on purple. None of us were certain why this should be so. Is the blue just a waxy cuticle, or is it a diffraction color like the metallic blue one can see on some butterflies or bird wings? Some ferns turn an iridescent blue, in a strategy evolved for absorbing more light. Would this *Pellaea* revert to green in bright light? We gathered some to take home and experiment with in different illuminations.

The block between 109th and 110th Streets was the richest so far. Here—and nowhere else—Griggs's favorite, *Cystopteris tenuis*, grows, along with the remarkable "walking fern," *Asplenium rhizophyllum*, which seems to shoot out new limbs like a brachiating gibbon, putting down suckers at intervals, thus striding across great expanses of stone.

And then, suddenly, strangely, at 110th Street the ferns stopped. From that point north, there was a startling, lifeless desolation, as if someone had decided to eradicate all signs of cryptogamic life. No one knew for sure why this was so, but we quickly crossed over to the sunny side of the trestle and began to work our way south again.

—*Oliver Sacks*

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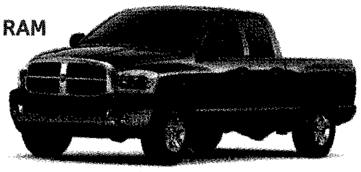

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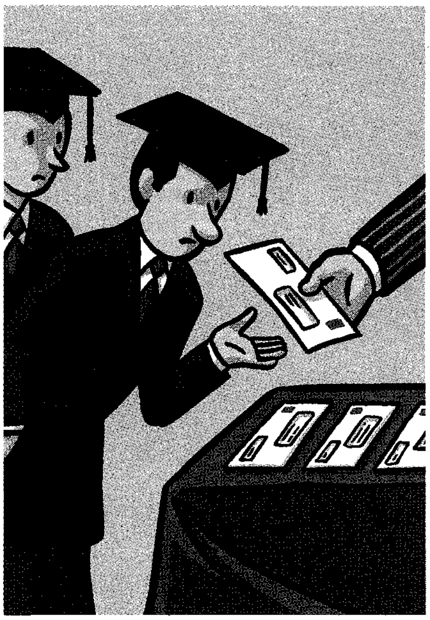
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
RENT-SEEKERS

When Americans think of college these days, the first word that often comes to mind is "debt." And from "debt" it's just a short hop to other unpleasant words, like "payola," "kickback," and "bribery." At least, that's how it's been since this spring, when news broke that student-loan companies had been using unsavory and possibly illegal tactics to get preferential treatment from university financial-aid officers. At some universities, officers were given stock options in companies whose loans they recommended to incoming students, while at others lenders offered millions of dollars in perks to schools that would stop doing business with competitors. In response, the Senate passed a bill toughening rules against "inducements" from lenders to administrators. All well and good, but it leaves untouched a more fundamental scandal: the huge profits that lenders make from student loans are being earned on the government's dime.

For decades, student-loan companies have had one of the cushiest businesses in America. We want college students to be able to finance their education at reasonable rates. But banks are understandably leery of lending to people with no collateral and uncertain future earnings. So we provide incentives to lend. The federal government, for instance, guarantees the so-called Stafford loans that college students get: if a student defaults, the government will pay off almost the entire loan. On top of that, the government hands out billions of dollars in subsidies to lenders every year, all but insuring them a steady profit. In effect, lenders get a guaranteed return with very little risk.

This convoluted process is good at making student-loan companies rich—Sallie Mae, the biggest issuer of student loans, earned $1.3 billion last year, with a return on equity that dwarfs most other companies'. But it's not very good at getting government money to students cheaply and efficiently. President Bush's 2007 budget shows, for instance, that it's four times as expensive for the government to subsidize and guarantee private loans as for it to issue those loans itself. In other words, the current system is not just corrupt. It's also inefficient. So why are we stuck with it?

In part, it's ideology, and the dominance of what you might call the privatization mystique—the idea that anything the government can do, the private sector can do better. Often, this makes sense: the free market is more likely to come up with efficient ways of creating and distributing products and services than the government is. But the student-loan market isn't a free market in any meaningful sense of the term, because the government effectively determines prices, insures against losses, and subsidizes volume. In this environment, most of the competition among private companies is really just squabbling over how to split up the spoils. Economists call this behavior—when a company seeks to manipulate economic conditions rather than actually create value—"rent-seeking." It's common in areas where the fetish for privatization has taken hold, such as the outsourcing of homeland security to private contractors and the boom in private Medicare insurers. (The private insurers are less efficient than Medicare and receive billions in subsidies from the government.) Outsourcing tasks to private companies is supposed to let government reap the benefits of the free market. But sometimes it just ends up uniting the worst of government and the worst of the private sector into one expensive mess.

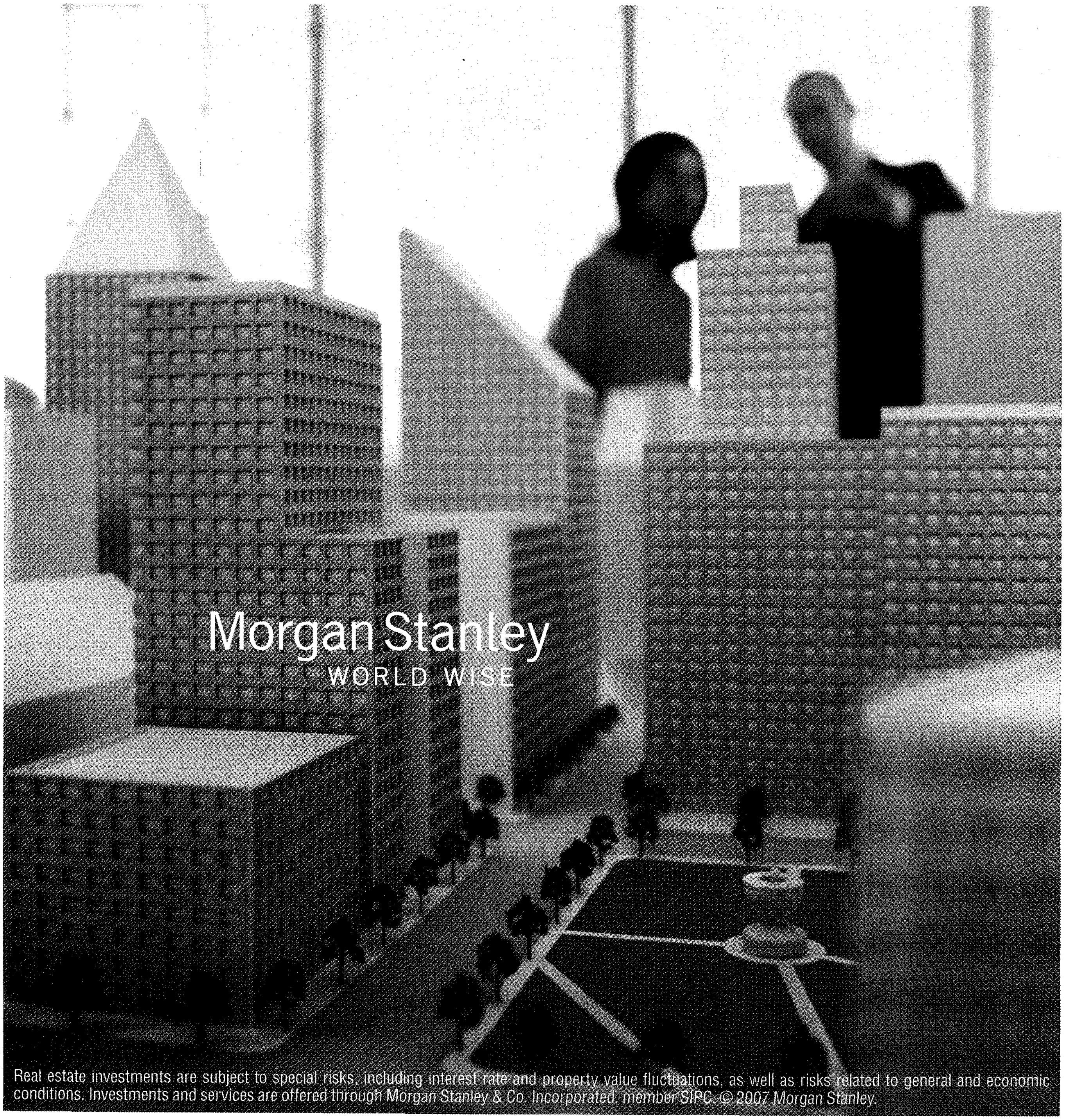


More than just ideology, though, has kept student-loan companies in their lucrative niche. Economic power has also had something to do with it. Since the mid-nineteen-nineties, the federal government has offered direct student loans, making it unnecessary for students to go through private lenders. The loans are significantly cheaper for the government, but, from the start of this program, private lenders have done all they could to limit its reach. They've worked to keep the Education Department from offering discounts and rebates to borrowers. They've lobbied against interest-rate cuts on student loans. And they've offered colleges millions of dollars to drop out of the direct-loan program. The lenders can afford to engage in these shenanigans, of course, because of the billions of dollars the government gives them every year. In effect, taxpayers have been subsidizing their own competition.

What's to be done? The continuing repercussions from this spring's scandal, and the election of a Democratic Congress, have been having an effect: Congress will shortly pass legislation that, among other things, would slash the subsidies for private lenders (although it's unclear how many of the toughest provisions will actually make it into law). But truly revamping the student-loan program will require renewed confidence in the ability of government programs to serve individuals. As it happens, there's evidence for this in the history of student aid itself, which stretches back to the G.I. Bill, when the government committed itself to paying for the college education of returning veterans. An overwhelming success, the bill involved no middlemen: the government paid tuition fees directly to colleges. Veterans' educational benefits in general have been instrumental in expanding the number of students in college. Talk of the government running anything, of course, makes people anxious, conjuring up images of state-run steel factories, but the truth is that the government is already running the student-loan market. The problem is that up to now it's been run in the interests of student-loan companies. Maybe it's time to start running it in the interests of students.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



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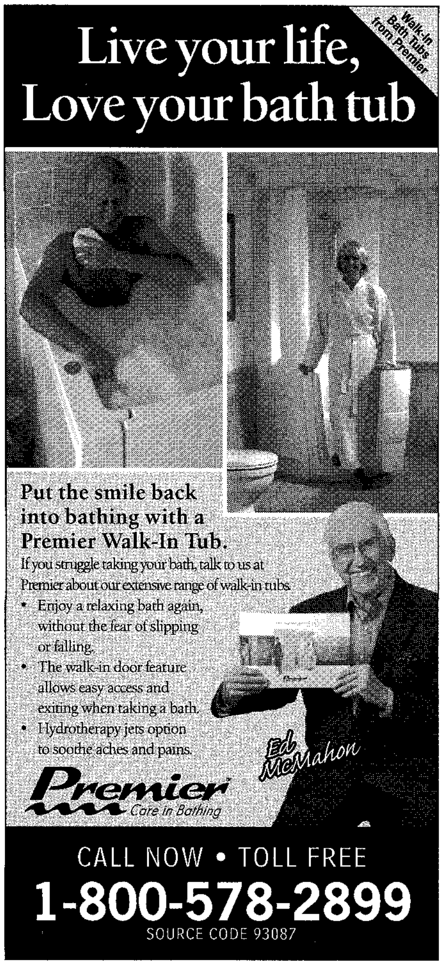
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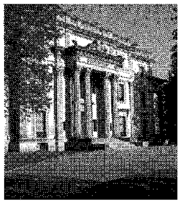

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ANNALS OF MEDICINE

AN ERROR IN THE CODE

What can a rare disorder tell us about human behavior?

BY RICHARD PRESTON

One day in September, 1962, a woman who here will be called Deborah Morlen showed up at the pediatric emergency room of the Johns Hopkins Hospital, in Baltimore, carrying her four-and-a-half-year-old son, Matthew. He was spastic, and couldn't walk or sit up; as an infant, he had been diagnosed as having cerebral palsy and developmental retardation. The emergency room was in the Harriet Lane Home for Invalid Children, an old brick building in the center of the Johns Hopkins complex, where a pediatric resident named Nancy Esterly saw Matthew. He had strange-colored urine, Mrs. Morlen told Esterly, "and there's sand in his diaper." Esterly removed the boy's diaper. It was stained a deep, bright orange, with a pink tinge. She touched the cloth and felt grit. She had no idea what this was, except that the pink looked like blood. She learned from Mrs. Morlen that Matthew had an older brother, Harold, who was also spastic and retarded. Harold was living at the Rosewood State Hospital, an institution for disabled children, outside Baltimore, while Matthew lived at home.

Since both brothers seemed to have the same condition, Esterly thought it likely that they had a genetic disease, but, if so, it wasn't one that she'd ever seen or heard of. Esterly also noted that Matthew was wearing mittens, even though it was a warm day. She admitted the little boy to the hospital.

Esterly took a sample of Matthew's urine, and both she and an intern looked at it under a microscope. They saw that it was filled with crystals. They were beautiful—they were as clear as glass, and they looked like bundles of needles, or like fireworks going off. They were sharp, and it was clear that they were tearing up the boy's urinary tract, causing bleeding. Esterly and the intern pored over photographs of crystals in a medical textbook. The intern asked if the crystals might be uric acid, a waste product excreted by the kidneys; however, cystine, an amino acid that can form kidney stones, seemed the most likely candidate. Esterly needed a confirmation of that diagnosis, so she carried the sample upstairs to the top floor, where William L. Nyhan, a pediatrician and research scientist, had a laboratory. "Bill Nyhan was the guru of metabolism," Esterly told me.

Nyhan, who was then in his thirties, had been studying how cancer cells metabolized amino acids, in an attempt to find ways to cure cancer in children. "It was one of my impossible projects," he said to me recently. Nyhan is now a professor of pediatrics at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine. "I love working with kids, but dealing with pediatric cancer was depressing, saddening, and, in truth, maddening," he said. Nyhan ran some tests on Matthew's urine, using equipment he had designed. The crystals weren't cystine, or any sort of amino acid. They proved to be uric acid. A high concentration of uric acid in a person's blood can lead to gout, a painful disease in which crystals grow in the joints and extremities, particularly in the big toe. Gout has been known since the time of Hippocrates, and it occurs mainly in older men. Yet the patient here was a little boy. Nyhan had a medical student named Michael Lesch working in his lab, and together they went downstairs.

Matthew lay in a bed in an open ward on the second floor of the Harriet Lane Home. He was a spot of energy in the ward, a bright-eyed child with a body that seemed out of control. The staff had tied his arms and legs to the bedframe with strips of white cloth, to keep him from thrashing, and they had wrapped his hands in many layers of gauze; they looked like white clubs. Nurses hovered around the boy. "He knew I was a doctor and he knew where he was. He was alert," Nyhan says. Matthew greeted Lesch and Nyhan in a friendly way, but his speech was almost unintelligible: he had dysarthria, an inability to control the muscles that make speech. They noticed scarring and fresh cuts around his mouth.

They inspected Matthew's feet. No sign of gout. Then the boy's arms and legs were freed, and Lesch and Nyhan saw a complex pattern of stiff and involuntary movements, a condition called dystonia. Nyhan had the gauze unwrapped from the boy's hands.

Matthew looked frightened. He asked Nyhan to stop, and then he began crying. When the last layer was removed, they saw that the tips of several of the boy's fingers were missing. Matthew started screaming, and thrust his hands toward his mouth. With a sense of shock, Nyhan realized that the boy had bitten off parts of his fingers. He also seemed to have bitten off parts of his lips.

"The kid really blew my mind," Nyhan said. "The minute I saw him, I knew that this was a syndrome, and that somehow all of these things we were seeing were related."

Lesch and Nyhan began to make regular visits to the ward. Sometimes Matthew would reach out and snatch Nyhan's eyeglasses and throw them across the room. He had a powerful throw, apparently perfectly controlled, and it seemed malicious. "Sorry! I'm sorry!" Matthew would call, as Nyhan went to fetch his glasses.

The doctors persuaded Mrs. Morlen to bring her older son to the hospital. Harold, it turned out, had bitten his fingers even more severely than Matthew, and had chewed off his lower lip. Both boys were terrified of their hands, and screamed for help even as they bit them. The boys' legs would scissor, and they tended to fling out one arm and the opposite leg, like a fencer lunging. The Morlen brothers, the doctors found, had several times more uric acid in their blood than normal children do.

Nyhan and Lesch visited the Morlen home, a row house in a working-class neighborhood in East Baltimore, where Matthew was living with his mother and grandmother. "He was a well-accepted member of his little household, and they were very casual about his condition," Nyhan says. The women had devised a contraption to keep him from biting his hands, a padded broomstick that they placed across his shoulders, and they tied his arms to it like a scarecrow. The family called it the "stringlyjack." Matthew often asked to wear it.

Nyhan and Lesch also discovered Lesch-Nyhan boys while visiting state institutions for developmentally disabled people. When I asked him how long it took him to diagnose a case, he said, "Seconds." He went on, "You walk into a big room, and you're looking at a sea of blank faces. All of a sudden you notice this kid staring at you. He's highly aware of you. He relates readily to strangers. He's usually off in a corner, where he's the pet of the nurses. And you see the injuries around his lips."

Sufferers of Lesch-Nyhan syndrome are uncontrollably driven to harm themselves.

LORENZO MATTOTTI

that they liked the Morlen brothers. Lesch, who is now the chairman of the Department of Medicine at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital, in New York City, said, "Matthew and Harold were really engaging kids. I enjoyed being around them."

Two years after meeting Matthew Morlen, Nyhan and Lesch published the first paper describing the disease, which came to be called Lesch-Nyhan syndrome. Almost immediately, doctors began sending patients to Nyhan. Very few doctors had ever seen a person with Lesch-Nyhan syndrome, and boys with the disease were, and are, frequently misdiagnosed as having cerebral palsy. (Girls virtually never get it.) Nyhan himself found a number of

William Nyhan is now eighty-one, a tall, fit man with blondish-gray hair and blue eyes. He has a laboratory overlooking a wild canyon near the U.C.S.D. Medical Center. One day when I visited him, two red-tailed hawks were soaring above the canyon, tracing circles in the air. In the years since he identified Lesch-Nyhan, he has discovered or co-discovered a number of other inherited metabolic diseases, and he has developed effective treatments for some of them. He figured out how to essentially cure a rare genetic disorder called multiple carboxylase deficiency, which could kill babies within hours of birth, by administering small doses of biotin, a B vitamin. Lesch-Nyhan, however, has proved to be more intractable.

Decades after the discovery of Lesch-Nyhan syndrome, it is still mysterious. It is perhaps the clearest example of a simple change in the human DNA which leads to a striking, comprehensive change in behavior. In 1971, William Nyhan coined the term "behavioral phenotype" to describe the nature of diseases like Lesch-Nyhan syndrome. A phenotype is an outward trait, or a collection of outward traits, that arises from a gene or genes—for example, brown eyes. Someone who has a behavioral phenotype displays a pattern of characteristic actions that can be linked to the genetic code. Lesch-Nyhan syndrome seems to be a window onto the deepest parts of the human mind, offering glimpses of the mechanics of the genetic code operating on thought and personality.

H. A. Jinnah, a neurologist at Johns Hopkins Hospital, has been studying Lesch-Nyhan syndrome for more than fifteen years. "This is a very horrible disease, and a very complex brain problem," he said. "It is also one of the best models we have for trying to trace the action of one gene on complex human behavior."

A child born with Lesch-Nyhan syndrome seems normal at first, but by the age of three months he has become a so-called floppy baby, and can't hold up his head or sit up. His diapers may have orange sand in them. When the boy cuts his first teeth, he starts using them to bite himself, and he screams in terror and pain during bouts of self-mutilation. "I get calls in the middle of the night from parents, saying, 'My kid's chewing himself to bits—what do I do?'" Nyhan said. The boy ends up in a wheelchair, because he can't learn to walk. As he grows older, his self-injurious behaviors become subtle or more elaborate, more devious. He seems to be possessed by a demon that forever seeks new ways to hurt him. He spits, strikes, and curses at the people he likes the most; one way to tell if a Lesch-Nyhan patient doesn't like you is if he's being nice. ("I got beat up once by Matthew," Lesch told me. He had leaned over the boy and asked him how he was feeling, and Matthew had punched him in the nose.) He eats foods he can't stand; he vomits on himself; he says yes when he means no. This is self-sabotage.

A few hundred boys and men alive in the United States today have been diagnosed as having Lesch-Nyhan syndrome. "I think I know most of them," Nyhan said. One boy, known as J.J., ended up living in Nyhan's research unit for a year, when he was eleven. He was a gregarious child, whose hands seemed to hate him. Over time, his fingers had got inside his mouth and nose and had broken out and removed the bones of his upper palate and parts of his sinuses, leaving a cavern in his face. He had also bitten off several fingers. J.J. died in his late teens; in the past, many Lesch-Nyhan patients died in childhood or their teens, from kidney failure. (Both Morlen brothers died young.) Nowadays, they may live into their thirties and forties, but they are generally frail and often die from infections like pneumonia. Occasionally, a man with the disease flings his head backward with such force that his neck is broken. Many Lesch-Nyhan patients die suddenly and often inexplicably.

A Lesch-Nyhan person may be fine for days, until suddenly his hands jump into his mouth with the suddenness of a cobra strike, and he cries for help. People with Lesch-Nyhan feel pain as acutely as anyone else does, and they are horrified by the idea of their fingers or lips being severed. They feel as if their hands and mouth don't belong to them and are under the control of something else. Some Lesch-Nyhan people have bitten off their tongues, and some have a record of self-enucleation—they have pulled out an eye or stabbed it with a sharp object. When the Lesch-Nyhan demon is dozing, they enjoy being around people, they like being the center of attention, and they make friends easily. "They really are great people, and I think that's part of the disease, too," Nyhan said. Some Lesch-Nyhan people are cognitively impaired, while others are clearly bright, but their intelligence can't be measured easily. "How do you measure someone's intelligence if, when you put a book in front of him, he has an irresistible urge to tear out the pages?" Nyhan asked.

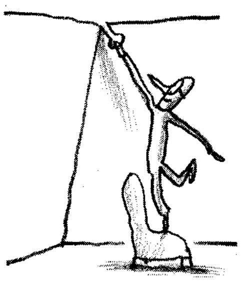
"I'm not a guru. I'm just hanging out here till my renovation is done."

In 1967, J. Edwin Seegmiller, a scientist at the National Institutes of Health, and two colleagues discovered that in Lesch-Nyhan patients a protein called hypoxanthine-guanine phosphoribosyl transferase, or HPRT, which is present in all normal cells, doesn't seem to work. The job of this enzyme is to help recycle DNA. Cells are constantly breaking down DNA into its four basic building blocks (represented by the letters A, T, C, and G, for adenine, thymine, cytosine, and guanine). This process produces compounds called purines, which can be used to form new code. If HPRT is absent, or doesn't work, then certain purines build up in a person's cells, where they are eventually broken down into uric acid, which saturates the blood and crystallizes in the urine.

In the early nineteen-eighties, a group of researchers, led by Douglas J. Jolly and Theodore Friedmann, decoded the sequence of letters in the human gene that contains the instructions for making HPRT. It includes six hundred and fifty-seven letters that code for the protein. Researchers also began sequencing this gene in people who had Lesch-Nyhan. Each had a mutation in the gene, but, remarkably, nearly everyone had a different one; there was no single mutation that caused Lesch-Nyhan. The mutations had apparently appeared spontaneously in each affected family. And, in the majority of cases, the defect consisted of just one misspelling in the code. For example, an American boy known as D.G. had a single G replaced by an A—one out of the three billion letters of code in the human genome. As a result, he was tearing himself apart.

The HPRT gene is found on the X chromosome. Women have two X chromosomes in each cell, and men have an XY pair. Lesch-Nyhan syndrome is an X-linked recessive disorder. This means that if a bad HPRT gene on one X chromosome is paired with a normal gene on the other X chromosome the disease does not develop. A woman who has the Lesch-Nyhan mutation carries it on only one of her X chromosomes—she doesn't develop the syndrome. Any son that she has, however, will have a fifty-per-cent chance of inheriting the syndrome, and any daughter will have a fifty-per-cent chance of being a carrier. (Examples of this type of disease include hemophilia and a form of red-green color blindness.)

Other genetic mutations have been associated with profound behavioral changes. Rett syndrome, which affects mostly girls, is caused by a mutation in a gene that codes for the MeCP2 protein. People with the syndrome compulsively wring their hands and rub them together as if they were washing them. Children with Williams syndrome have an elfin appearance, an affinity for music and language, and an extreme sensitivity to sound, and are very sociable. Williams syndrome is caused by the deletion of a bit of code from chromosome 7. There is still great uncertainty, however, about how much of a role genes play in major conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, and borderline personality disorder. Even where there is evidence of a family history of a disease, scientists are unsure how a single gene could choreograph a suite of behaviors. There are roughly twenty-five thousand active genes in the human genome, each with about a thousand to fifteen hundred letters of code. The genome could be thought of as a kind of piano with twenty-five thousand keys. In some cases, a few keys may be out of tune, which can cause the music to sound wrong. In others, if one key goes dead the music turns into a cacophony, or the whole piano self-destructs.



The havoc that the Lesch-Nyhan mutation causes can't easily be undone. Early on, Nyhan tried giving his patients allopurinol, a drug that inhibits the production of uric acid; it is effective with gout. It lowered the uric-acid concentration in Lesch-Nyhan patients, but it didn't reduce their self-injurious actions. The uric acid, it seemed, was another symptom, and not a cause of the behavior. Nyhan has experimented with other treatments, such as soft restraints, which seem to relax patients, and the removal of certain teeth. "I'm profligate with those upper teeth," Nyhan said. Some dentists, though, refuse to extract healthy teeth, even when Lesch-Nyhan syndrome is explained to them.

I told Nyhan that I couldn't imagine what it would be like to live with the disease.

"You could ask someone who has it," he replied.

I first met James Elrod and Jim Murphy in the winter of 1999. They were living next to each other in rented bungalows in a somewhat marginal neighborhood in Santa Cruz, California. Elrod was then in his early forties, and Murphy was just over thirty. (Murphy died in 2004; Elrod, who is now forty-nine, is one of the oldest living people with Lesch-Nyhan.) The men were clients of Mainstream Support, a private company contracted by the State of California to help people with developmental disabilities live in community settings. Before James Elrod came to Santa Cruz, he lived for eighteen years in a state institution in San Jose. Murphy had lived for most of his life at an institution in Sonoma. Mainstream employees, called direct-care staff, stayed with Elrod and Murphy around the clock, to help them with daily tasks and to make sure they didn't harm themselves. Elrod and Murphy had the authority to hire and fire their assistants and direct their work, though an assistant could refuse an order if he thought that it would put the client in danger.

At that time, Mainstream was run by two men named Andy Pereira and Steve Glenn. "James and Jim are real down-and-gritty guys," Pereira said, the first time I talked to him. "They are not sweet types. They're into fast cars and women." Glenn said that he still had difficulty seeing into the labyrinth of Lesch-Nyhan. "There are these Lesch-Nyhan moments when you feel like you've kind of got it," he said. "James and Jim are pretty good at telling you when they think they're in danger of hurting themselves, but, whenever they're doing something, you always have to ask, Is this James or Jim, or is it Lesch-Nyhan?"

James Elrod has a square, good-looking face, which is marked with scars, and brown, hyperalert eyes. His shoulders and arms are large and powerful, but the rest of his body seems slightly diminished. One day, before he was with Mainstream, an attendant left him alone at dinner for a few minutes. To Elrod's horror, his left hand picked up a fork and used it to stab his nose and gouge it out, permanently mutilating his face. "My left side is my devil side," he told me. When I met him, he wore black leather motorcycle gloves that had been reinforced with Kevlar. If he thought that his left hand was threatening him or someone else, he would grab it or swat it with his right hand. He owns a pickup truck, and his assistants drive him around in it. He used to sell flowers on the Santa Cruz pier, and he carries business cards explaining that he has a rare disease that compels him to hurt himself. "I have injured myself in many ways including my nose, as you can see," the card says. "I will even try to hurt myself by getting into trouble with others." One day, a

"It starts earlier every year."

man bought flowers from Elrod and said, "God bless you." "Eat shit," Elrod replied, and handed the man his business card. While crossing a street in his wheelchair, Elrod has been known to try to roll himself into traffic, yelling, "Slow down, you morons! Don't you know it's Lesch-Nyhan?" His assistants wrestle him to safety.

Elrod was sitting in front of his house in his wheelchair when I arrived. It was a sunny day. He offered me his right hand to shake. When I gripped his glove, the right index finger collapsed. "You broke my finger!" he gasped. Then he grinned and explained that he didn't have that finger. "Some people get all upset when I do that," he said. "Kids love it. They want to break my finger again."

We chatted for a while. "Hey, Richard—danger," he said.

"What's wrong?"

He cautiously pointed at the pencil I was using to take notes. "Your pencil is scaring me. My hand could grab it and put it in my eye," he said. "You'd better go see my neighbor."

Jim Murphy was sitting in his wheelchair at a table in the living room of his house, and an assistant named Michael Roth cut up pancakes and fed them to him with a spoon. Murphy was a bony man with dark hair and a lean, handsome face. He had a neatly trimmed goatee and a crewcut, and his eyes were mobile and sensitive-looking. His lips were missing. Two of his brothers had also had Lesch-Nyhan, and had died when they were young. "Jimmy will be shy when you first meet him," one of his sisters had told me on the phone. I could expect to hear a lot of swearing, though. "He doesn't mean it," she said. "When he swears at me, I just say, 'I love you, too.'"

That day in Santa Cruz, Murphy stared at me out of the corners of his eyes, with his head involuntarily thrown back and turned away, braced against a headboard. His hands were stuffed into many pairs of white socks, and his chest heaved against a rubber strap that held him in place. He started throwing punches at me, and he kicked at me. He seemed to be enduring his disease like a man riding a wild horse. The wheelchair shook.

I kept back. "It's nice to meet you," I said.

"Fuck you. Nice to meet you." Murphy had a fuzzy but pleasant-sounding voice. His speech was very hard to understand. He looked at Roth. "I'm nervous," he said.

"Do you want to be restrained?" Roth asked.

"Yeah."

Roth placed Murphy's wrists and ankles in soft cuffs fastened with Velcro.

"I'm a little nervous, too," I said, and sat down on the couch.

"I don't care. Goodbye."

I stood up to leave.

Roth explained, however, that this was one of those Lesch-Nyhan situations where words mean their opposite.

Later, Murphy tried to tell me what his disease was like. "You try to tick everybody off, and then you feel bad when you do it," he said. "If you get too close to me, I could—," he said; the ending was indecipherable.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Coldcock you, Richard. I'll say, 'Get my water,' and I'll give you a sucker punch."

A pair of red boxing gloves hung on the wall. Every day, his assistants placed him on a wrestling mat on the floor, where he rolled around and did stretches and then boxed with them. "I could definitely whip you," he told me. I didn't doubt it.

There have been about twenty autopsies of Lesch-Nyhan patients over the years. Their brains appeared to be perfectly normal. "It's a problem in the connections, in the way the brain functions," H. A. Jinnah, the Johns Hopkins neurologist, said. During some of the autopsies, doctors tested samples of brain tissue to see if they contained normal levels of neurotransmitters—chemicals that are used for signalling between nerve cells. In the Lesch-Nyhan brains, a lemon-size area containing structures called the basal ganglia, near the center of the brain, had eighty per cent less dopamine—an important neurotransmitter—than a normal brain. The basal ganglia are wired into circuits that run all over the brain and affect a wide range of functions: motor control, higher-level thinking, and eye movement, as well as impulse control and enthusiasm.

"People with Lesch-Nyhan have an excess number of involuntary movements," Jinnah said. "It's as if they are stepping on the gas too hard when they try to do something. If you ask them to look at a red ball, for instance, their eyes go to everything except the red ball, and they can't explain why. Then, if you introduce a yellow ball into their field of view, but you don't say anything about it, they watch the yellow ball." The moment you draw their attention to it, however, they look away.

"Lesch-Nyhan is at the far end of a spectrum of self-injurious behavior," Jinnah went on. "We all do things that are bad for us. We'll sit down in front of the television and eat a quart of ice cream. We all have self-injurious impulses, too. Driving a car, we can have a strange impulse to drive it the wrong way and smash it into something." Edgar Allan Poe called such promptings "the imp of the perverse." The imp may be signals coming out of the basal ganglia. Normal people feel the promptings of the imp, but most of the time they don't act on them. Lesch-Nyhan may suggest a way in which original thoughts and ideas seem to arise as impulses that aren't suppressed, and how intimate the terrain is between the creative and the self-destructive. "Many people bite their fingernails," Jinnah said. "They'll tell you it's gross and that they don't want to do it—'Sometimes I get nervous and start biting my fingernails,' they'll say. There are people who chew their lips nervously. Now let's turn up the volume a little: some people bite their cuticles. Turn up the volume a little more: some people bite their cuticles until they bleed. Now let's turn the volume *way* up. Now you have someone biting off tissue and bone in his fingers, biting off the whole finger, and chewing his lips off. Where, in this spectrum of behavior, is free will?"

In some ways, Lesch-Nyhan syndrome looks like Parkinson's disease reversed. People with Parkinson's have trouble starting physical actions, and are said to be hypokinetic. Lesch-Nyhan people start actions too easily, and can't stop an action once it starts; they are said to be hyperkinetic. Because Parkinson's is also associated with a deficiency of dopamine in the basal ganglia, scientists have looked to each disease for clues to the other.

In 1973, a researcher named George Breese, at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, was working with rats that modelled Parkinson's disease. He was treating newborn rats with compounds that changed the dopamine levels in their brains, when, to his surprise, the rats started chewing off their paws. He had inadvertently created a rat with Lesch-Nyhan symptoms. "I'll not go further into the details of what the rats were doing. They weren't biting their mouth tissues, the way human patients do," Breese told me. If he gave the self-injuring rats another compound, they stopped biting their paws—that is, he found a way to reverse the symptoms. "We treated the rat the moment we saw the animal make the first pinprick injury to its paws," he said. The compound, however, has never been approved for use on humans.

In April, 2000, a neurosurgeon at the Tokyo Women's Medical University named Takaomi Taira performed brain surgery on a nineteen-year-old man with Lesch-Nyhan. The young man was living with his parents in a district north of Tokyo. In addition to exhibiting self-injurious behavior, he had the spastic, stiff, thrashing movements of dystonia. "These dystonic movements were getting more severe almost by the day, and his parents were getting desperate," Taira said to me recently. He decided to perform a procedure called deep-brain stimulation to try to calm down the movements.

Deep-brain stimulation was developed by doctors more than twenty years ago for treating people with Parkinson's disease. One or more thin wires are inserted through openings in the skull, and the wires are carefully navigated through the brain until they stop in a part of the basal ganglia called the globus pallidus (the "pale globe"). The wires are connected to a battery pack, which is implanted under the skin of the patient's chest, and a faint, pulsed current of electricity runs through them into the globus pallidus, numbing a spot the size of a pea. The patient feels nothing. The procedure often helps to calm the tremors in Parkinson's patients' hands and limbs, and helps them walk more easily.

"After the surgery, the boy's dystonic movement completely disappeared," Taira said. He sent him home with the deep-brain stimulator, feeling that the operation had helped. Several months later, the young man's parents told Taira that he had stopped biting himself. He was still in a wheelchair, and his uric-acid levels remained high, but he was reading comic books and watching television, and seemed to be enjoying life as never before. "It was completely unexpected, remarkable, almost unbelievable," Taira said. A few years later, the young man suddenly began biting his hands again, and the parents brought him back. "I checked the device and found that the battery was flat. I replaced the battery, and his symptoms were controlled again," Taira said.

A research group in Montpellier, France, led by a neurosurgeon named Philippe Coubes, has given deep-brain-stimulation implants to five Lesch-Nyhan patients. His method involves the insertion of four wires into the brain. "So far, we have three patients who are doing very well and two who are having an intermediate response—the response of one of those is not poor but is not as good as the others," Coubes said. "I'm not sure we will be able to control all their behaviors over the long term, but we are in the process of getting a better understanding of deep-brain stimulation for these patients." The imp of the perverse can be put to sleep, but nobody knows how to make it go away.

Scientists aren't sure why deep-brain stimulation seems to work in some patients, or if it can help others; indeed, the results are a reminder of how obscure the workings of the brain still are. Nor is it clear what the risks might be. William Nyhan was cautious about the procedure's potential. "I see these kids as fragile, and they don't respond very well to surgical invasions," he said.

At Johns Hopkins, though, Jinnah was anxious to begin a study on a group of at least eight Lesch-Nyhan patients using deep-brain stimulation. He still needs to secure funding and get approval from the federal government. (The procedure has not been specifically approved for Lesch-Nyhan patients.)

Jinnah has never had an easy time getting funding and attention for Lesch-Nyhan research. He says, "People ask me, 'Why not study more common diseases?' My answer is that if we neurologists did that we'd all be studying Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and strokes. There are thousands of other brain diseases out there, and they're all orphans. But these rare diseases may teach us something new about the brain, something relevant to the common brain diseases which affect so many people."

I went back several times to visit James Elrod and Jim Murphy, and began helping their staff with daily tasks. Elrod spat in my face a few times, and gave me a left jab to the jaw. Once, his Kevlar-covered fingers closed on my skin like pliers; he apologized while we both worked to get them loose. Murphy, at his thirty-third-birthday party, planted his face in his cake, and then punched me. Nevertheless, I came to like them a lot. Murphy had a passion for off-road driving, which he was not usually able to indulge. One day, in 2001, I showed up in Santa Cruz in a rented Ford Expedition with four-wheel drive. An assistant named Tracye Overby was with Murphy, while another, named Chris Reeves, was assigned to Elrod. I drove the group to a dried-out lake bed near Watsonville called College Lake, which we'd heard was a good place for four-wheeling. On the way, I stopped to get directions from a California state trooper. "I would not advise going there with disabled people," he said.

College Lake turned out to be a mile-wide expanse of lardlike clay, covered with sand. The lake bed had a dark, wet-looking center, and was surrounded by thickets of willows. I edged the Expedition out onto the sand. "Go faster," Murphy said. "You're driving like an old lady." I gunned the engine, the Expedition leaped forward, and we raced across the sand. When I turned sharply, the men roared with delight. I performed a figure eight, then aimed the vehicle toward the center of the lake and ran it up to full power. We passed the sunken carcass of a truck, buried up to its roof in clay. The Expedition slowed. Then it began tipping over, and I realized that we were driving across what you might call quickmud. If we stopped, we would go down. I floored the engine, but it was too late. The wheels began spinning, we came to a halt and sank up to the doors, and the engine stalled.

There was a moment of silence, and then Elrod and Murphy erupted with obscenities directed at me. The two helpers seemed unperturbed. "This is just the nature of our work," Reeves said. "Everything that you plan never goes as you planned it."

After several tries on my cell phone, I reached a towing company that was willing to try to get us out, but it would need to be paid in advance, cash preferred, no results guaranteed.

"I'm nervous," Murphy said as we waited. Blood dribbled out of his mouth—he was biting himself. Overby lifted him out of the car, carried him across the sand to the shade of some willows, and sat down, holding him in her lap. She wiped his mouth with a napkin, cradled his head in her arms, and began singing to him. He began to laugh.

Elrod, sitting in the front seat of the Expedition, began laughing, too. The men were connoisseurs of what I had done: I had ignored the advice of a police officer and driven two disabled men at high speed into the mud. They saw something familiar in my behavior.

Three years later, in 2004, Murphy came down with pneumonia. When it became clear that he was dying, I called him to say goodbye. As he came on the line, I could hear voices in the background; more than thirty people had come to see him. "I'll be all right," he said, and added, "Take care with your driving."

Another day, before Murphy died, I visited James Elrod. Tracye Overby, who was working as Elrod's assistant, needed to change the silk liners that he wears inside his motorcycle gloves.

Elrod did not like to see his bare hands. He asked me to hold his wrists while Overby removed his gloves. The hands that emerged were pale, with spindly fingers that had been gnawed close to the bone in places, and a finger was missing. "Danger," he said. His eyes took on a strange, bright, blank look. He was staring at the right hand. His arm was tense and trembling. As if a magnet were pulling it, the hand moved toward his mouth. "Help!" he called in a muffled voice.

We threw ourselves on Elrod. It took all our strength to restrain his hand. As soon as we got control of it, he relaxed. Overby got the gloves back on.

"Nobody knows about this disease. Every day I'm hoping for a cure," Elrod said. "I wanted you to see that." ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

AESOP IN THE CITY

BY YONI BRENNER

The Hawk and the Mouse

A clever mouse is sunning himself in Battery Park, when a hawk swoops down and seizes him in her talons. Whistling through the air, the mouse warns the hawk not to eat him. "Why shouldn't I?" says the hawk. "Don't you know," says the mouse, "that mice are loaded with trans fats?" Alarmed, the hawk releases the mouse and flies away. Several days later, the hawk happens upon an old owl devouring a less fortunate mouse. "Stop!" cries the hawk. "Don't you know those things are loaded with trans fats?" The owl stops eating and says, "What are you, an idiot?"

Moral: You just can't argue with libertarians.

The Fox and the Goat

A fox is offered free tickets from Cindy in P.R. She drops them off after lunch, and the fox is dismayed to find that they are for an experimental Swedish dance company called Leøtåård. He takes the tickets to the goat in the next cubicle. "Leøtåård?" says the goat. "I've never heard of them." "I saw them last week," coos the fox. "The Scandinavian Alvin Ailey. I'll give them to you for ten bucks." And so, while the goat spends the evening in a dank underground space off Avenue C, the fox goes to Ollie's and spends the ten dollars on lo mein. Sure enough, the performance is awful and the goat gets a massive strobe-light headache. Still, inexplicably, he puts his name on the e-mail list.

Moral: Always check the Web site.

The Crow and the Hare

Waiting for the uptown No. 1 train, a hare becomes ill and tumbles onto the tracks. "Help me!" the hare shouts to a nearby crow. But the crow is uncertain. "How do I know you won't eat me?" he asks. "I'm helpless," replies the hare. "Besides, hares do not eat crows." Satisfied, the crow flutters down from the platform and grips the hare by the scruff of the neck. Suddenly, the hare flips around and eats the crow. "That'll show him," he says.

Moral: Hares will eat anything.

The Dog and the Magic Hen

A dog in the East Nineties is lying on the curb when a friendly hen happens by and asks him what's wrong. "My bone," says the dog. "It's stuck under the tire of that Volvo." "I'll tell you what," says the hen. "Come back Tuesday at eleven-thirty and I will make the Volvo disappear." And so the dog returns Tuesday morning and, sure enough, the Volvo is gone. "Amazing!" says the dog, his bone retrieved. "I'll do you one better," clucks the hen. "Come back tomorrow and I will make the cars on the other side of the street disappear." The dog comes back the next day and, as promised, the other side of the street is empty. "Incredible," marvels the dog. "I guess this is why they call you the Magic Hen." "No," replies the hen. "They call me that because I sell acid."

Moral: You didn't hear it from me.

The Mouse and the Donald

Ambling through Central Park one day, a mouse happens upon Donald Trump, trapped in a hunter's net. The mouse asks the Donald if he can be of any assistance. "How could *you* help *me*?" scoffs the Donald. "I am Donald Trump and you are just a lowly mouse."

Several years later, the Donald calls the mouse into his office. "Your division underperformed again, Johnson," says the Donald. "Someone's gonna have to take the fall." "But, Donald!" cries the mouse. "Don't you remember why you hired me? How I nibbled through that net and saved you from the hunters?" The Donald thinks for a moment, then replies, "I don't remember it that way."

Moral: Success is fleeting, so keep a paper trail.

The Jackdaw and the Expense Account

A jackdaw takes a job with a prominent consulting firm. One night, after working well past nine, he decides to go to Pastis on the company dime and invites his old friend the hare to join him. After the two have scanned the menu, a server comes to take their orders. "The ravioli for me," says the jackdaw. "And I'll have the *lapin à la cocotte*," says the hare. The server is aghast. "But, sir . . . that's rabbit." The hare shrugs. "Whatever."

Moral: Hares really will eat anything.

The Lion and the Donkey

A lion and a donkey go to a Knicks game, only to find that their seats are way back in Section 426. "I can't see anything!" moans the lion. The donkey replies, "Aren't you a lion? Just move down." So the lion proceeds to maul his way through the crowd, until he and the donkey find a nice spot on the 200 level. But, by the end of the first quarter, the lion is again dissatisfied and decides to maul his way to half-court seats. By the fourth quarter, the lion and the donkey are courtside. At this point, the lion, his paws caked with blood, scraps of licensed apparel stuck in his fangs, turns to the donkey and says, "They call that defense?"

Moral: You can't field a team with five pure shooters, quirky draft picks, and no inside presence and expect to win more than thirty-five games.

The Wolf, the Sheep, the H.R. Person, Mayor Bloomberg, Al Sharpton, and Jesse the Intern

A wolf applies for a job with the Parks Department. To his chagrin, he doesn't even get a second interview. He disguises himself in a sheepskin and reapplies, but the H.R. person is still unimpressed. Believing that he is the victim of discrimination, the wolf hires a lawyer, who notifies Al Sharpton, who puts in a call to Mayor Bloomberg. The Mayor holds a press conference at which he reaffirms the city's commitment to diversity and offers the sheep, who is actually a wolf, a job. The wolf accepts, and the whole thing blows over. After a month of answering phones, the wolf suddenly throws off the sheepskin and announces to the office that he is a wolf. Inspired by the wolf's example, Jesse the intern suddenly announces that he is gay. The office breaks into applause and everyone goes out for drinks to celebrate.

Moral: It's best to come out of the closet on a Friday, so people can let it sink in over the weekend. ♦

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LETTER FROM ITALY

SLIPPERY BUSINESS

The trade in adulterated olive oil.

BY TOM MUELLER

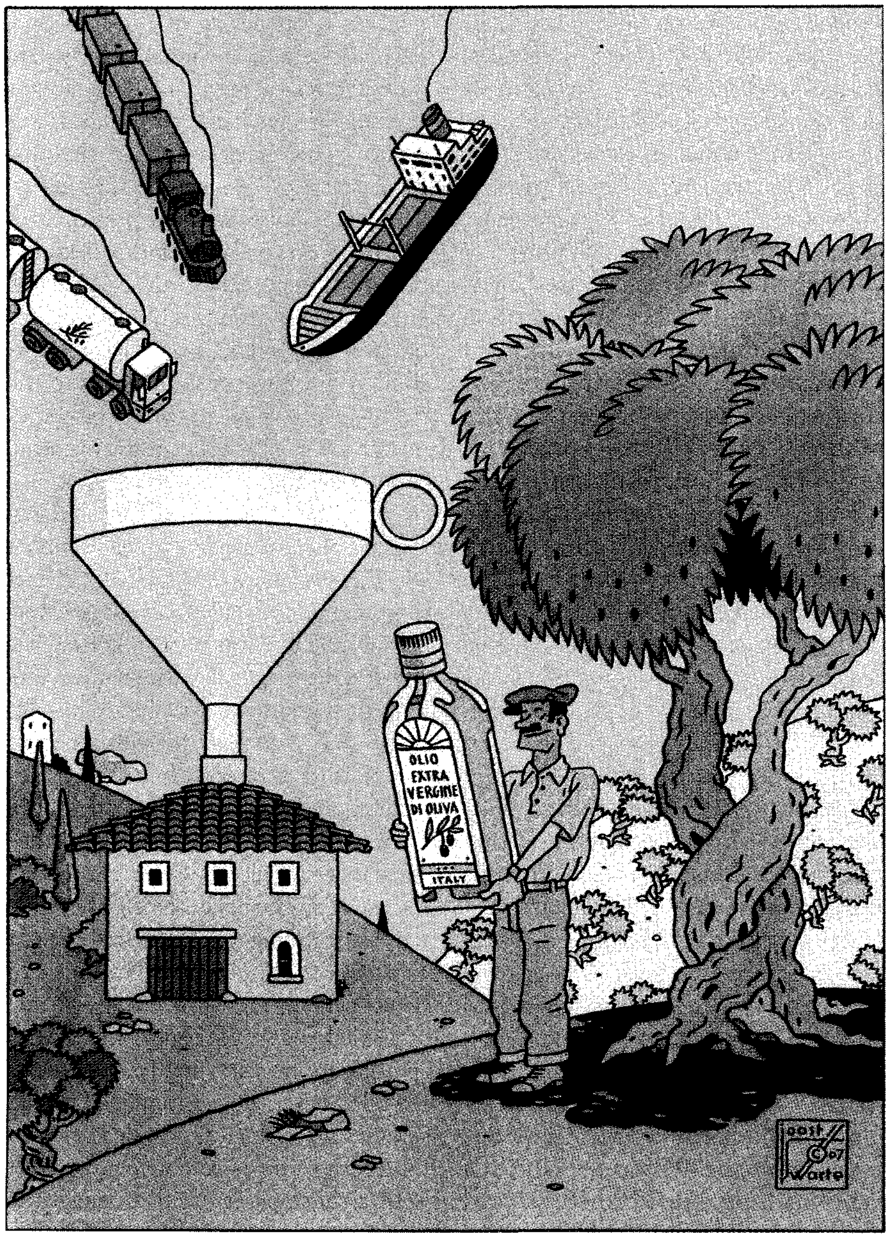
On August 10, 1991, a rusty tanker called the Mazal II docked at the industrial port of Ordu, in Turkey, and pumped twenty-two hundred tons of hazelnut oil into its hold. The ship then embarked on a meandering voyage through the Mediterranean and the North Sea. By September 21st, when the Mazal II reached Barletta, a port in Puglia, in southern Italy, its cargo had become, on the ship's official documents, Greek olive oil. It slipped through customs, possibly with the connivance of an official, was piped into tanker trucks, and was delivered to the refinery of Riolio, an Italian olive-oil producer based in Barletta. There it was sold—in some instances blended with real olive oil—to Riolio customers.

Between August and November of 1991, the Mazal II and another tanker, the Katerina T., delivered nearly ten thousand tons of Turkish hazelnut oil and Argentinean sunflower-seed oil to Riolio, all identified as Greek olive oil. Riolio's owner, Domenico Ribatti, grew rich from the bogus oil, assembling substantial real-estate holdings, including a former department store in Bari. He bribed two officials, one with cash, the other with cartons of olive oil, and made trips to Rome, where he stayed at the Grand Hotel, and met with other unscrupulous olive-oil producers from Italy and abroad. As one of Italy's leading importers of olive oil, Ribatti's company was a member of ASSITOL, the country's powerful olive-oil trade association, and Ribatti had enough clout in Rome to ask a favor—preferential treatment of an associate's nephew, who was seeking admission to a military officers' school—of a high-ranking official at the Finance Ministry, a fellow-*pugliese*.

However, by early 1992 Ribatti and his associates were under investigation by the Guardia di Finanza, the Finance Ministry's military-police force. One officer, wearing a miniature video camera on his tie, posed as a waiter at a lunch hosted by Ribatti at the Grand Hotel. Others, eavesdropping on telephone calls among Riolio executives, heard the rustle of bribe money being counted out. During the next two years, the Guardia di Finanza team, working closely with agents of the European Union's anti-fraud office, pieced together the details of Ribatti's crime, identifying Swiss bank accounts and Caribbean shell companies that Ribatti had used to buy the ersatz olive oil. The investigators discovered that seed and hazelnut oil had reached Riolio's refinery by tanker truck and by train, as well as by ship, and they found stocks of hazelnut oil waiting in Rotterdam for delivery to Riolio and other olive-oil companies.

The investigators also discovered where Ribatti's adulterated oil had gone: to some of the largest producers of Italian olive oil, among them Nestlé, Unilever, Bertolli, and Oleifici Fasanesi, who sold it to consumers as olive oil, and collected about twelve million dollars in E.U. subsidies intended to support the olive-oil industry. (These companies claimed that they had been swindled by Ribatti, and prosecutors were unable to prove complicity on their part.)

In 1997 and 1998, olive oil was the most adulterated agricultural product in the European Union, prompting the E.U.'s anti-fraud office to establish an olive-oil task force. ("Profits were comparable to cocaine trafficking, with none of the risks," one investigator told me.) The E.U. also began phasing out subsidies for olive-oil producers and bottlers, in an effort to reduce crime, and after a few years it disbanded the task force. Yet fraud remains a major international problem: olive oil is far more valuable than most other vegetable oils, but it is costly and time-consuming to produce—and surprisingly easy to doctor. Adulteration is especially common in Italy, the world's leading importer, consumer, and



"Fraud is so widespread that few growers can make an honest living," one expert says.

JOOST SWARTE

exporter of olive oil. (For the past ten years, Spain has produced more oil than Italy, but much of it is shipped to Italy for packaging and is sold, legally, as Italian oil.) "The vast majority of frauds uncovered in the food-and-beverage sector involve this product," Colonel Leopoldo Maria De Filippi, the commander for the northern half of Italy of the N.A.S. Carabinieri, an anti-adulteration group run under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, told me.

In Puglia, which produces about forty per cent of Italy's olives, growers have been in a near-constant state of crisis for more than a decade. "Thousands of olive-oil producers are victims of this 'drugged' market," Antonio Barile, the president of the Puglia chapter of a major farmers' union, told me, referring to illegal importations of seed oils and cheap olive oil from outside the E.U., which undercut local farmers. Instead of supporting small growers who make distinctive, premium oils, the Italian government has consistently encouraged quantity over quality, to the benefit of large companies that sell bulk oil. It has not implemented a national plan for oil production, has employed a byzantine system for distributing agricultural subsidies, and has often failed to enforce Italian laws and E.U. regulations intended to prevent fraud. The government has been so lax in pursuing some oil crimes that it can seem complicit. In 2000, the European Court of Auditors reported that Italy was responsible for eighty-seven per cent of misappropriated E.U. subsidies to olive-oil bottlers in the preceding fifteen years, and that the government had recovered only a fraction of the money.

Paolo De Castro, who was appointed Italy's agriculture minister in 2006, told me that olive-oil fraud has been a problem in the past but that he was taking action to curb it. "In the past few years, we have tightened things up a lot, through our Inspectorate for Quality Control, and through our *carabinieri* corps," he said. One problem is that Italian officials charged with detecting adulterated oil can, in theory, be held liable for their actions. "Who's going to take this responsibility?" asked Lanfranco Conte, a professor of food chemistry at the University of Udine, who in the early nineties was the head of a laboratory belonging to the Agriculture Ministry's anti-fraud unit. "If you decide to block three thousand tons of oil and it turns out you were wrong, you pay out of your own pocket." Colonel De Filippi acknowledged that some companies are essentially immune to investigation. "Unfortunately, there are big producers who have strong political ties," he said.

The olive is a drupe, or stone fruit, like a plum or a cherry. Most vegetable oils are extracted in a refinery from seeds or nuts, using solvents, heat, and intense pressure; the best olive oils are made using a simple hydraulic press or centrifuge—they are more like fresh-squeezed fruit juices than like industrial fats. The olives are harvested at the moment of the *invaiatura*, when they begin to turn from green to black; ideally they are picked by hand and milled within hours, to minimize oxidation and enzymatic reactions, which leave unpleasant tastes and odors in the oil. There are approximately seven hundred olive varieties, or cultivars, whose distinctive tastes and aromas are evident in oils that are made properly, just as different grape varietals are expressed in fine wines.

In the past decade, olive-oil consumption has risen thirty-five per cent in southern Europe, its traditional market, and more than a hundred per cent in North America. Much of the growth is due to the increasing prestige of the highest-quality olive oil, extra-virgin. (The European Union also recognizes several inferior grades, including virgin and *lampante*, or "lamp oil," which is made from olives that have spoiled and fallen from trees, and cannot legally be sold as food.) In Italy, where most olive oil is labelled "extra-virgin," competitions, public tastings, and "oil bars" have proliferated.

According to E.U. law, extra-virgin oil must be made exclusively by physical means (by a press or a centrifuge) and meet thirty-two chemical requirements, including having "free acidity" of no more than 0.8 per cent. (In olive oil, free acidity is an indicator of decomposition.) Virgin oil, the next grade lower, must have free acidity of no more than two per cent. Oil that has a greater percentage of free acidity is classified as *lampante*.

Most olive-oil frauds are easy to detect using chemical tests. In February, 2005, the N.A.S. Carabinieri broke up a criminal ring operating in several regions of Italy, and confiscated a hundred thousand litres of fake olive oil, with a street value of six million euros (about eight million dollars). The ring, which allegedly sold its products in northern Italy and in Germany, is accused of coloring low-grade soy oil and canola oil with industrial chlorophyll, flavoring it with beta-carotene, and packaging it as extra-virgin olive oil in tins and bottles emblazoned with pictures of Italian flags or Mt. Vesuvius, and with folksy names of imaginary producers—the Farmhouse, the Ancient Millstones.

More sophisticated scams, like Domenico Ribatti's, typically take place at high-tech refineries, where the oil is doctored with substances like hazelnut oil and deodorized *lampante* olive oil, which are extremely difficult to detect by chemical analysis. In 1991, the E.U., recognizing that laboratory tests fail to expose many acts of adulteration, instituted strict taste and aroma requirements for each grade of olive oil and established tasting panels, certified by the International Olive Oil Council, an office created by the United Nations, to enforce them. According to the E.U. regulations, extra-virgin oil must have appreciable levels of pepperiness, bitterness, and fruitiness, and must be free of sixteen official taste flaws, which include "musty," "fusty," "cucumber," and "grubby." "If there's one defect, it's not extra-virgin olive oil—*basta*, end of story," Flavio Zaramella, the president of the Corporazione Mastri Oleari, in Milan, one of the most respected private olive-oil associations, told me.

Zaramella, a garrulous sixty-six-year-old former businessman, has made oil from olives grown on his small farm in Umbria since 1985. He began to study olive oil systematically when he found that the local farmer who tended his trees had been cutting his oil with sunflower-seed oil. "Fraud is so widespread that few growers can make an honest living," he told me. Four recent operations for abdominal cancer have left him gaunt, but Zaramella still has plump, mobile hands and speaks in a mellow baritone. On a wall in his office is a map of Somalia, where, in 1987, as the head of a humanitarian-aid project, he supervised the construction of a high-tech hospital in Baraawe, a city on the Indian Ocean. "I got everyone working together: Communists, Catholic priests, Muslims, professors, illiterates, anyone with the will to get things done," he recalled. Two months after the hospital was completed, it was destroyed in the civil war. "Generosity is the purest form of egotism," he said.

"What's it like to be the parent of a nonhuman?"

Zaramella became the president of Mastri Oleari in 2000, and is devoting his remaining years to redeeming extra-virgin olive oil from fraud. He calls his fight for olive-oil quality a "civic responsibility," both to consumers and to the many small producers who struggle to make a living in a market awash in cheap, counterfeit oil.

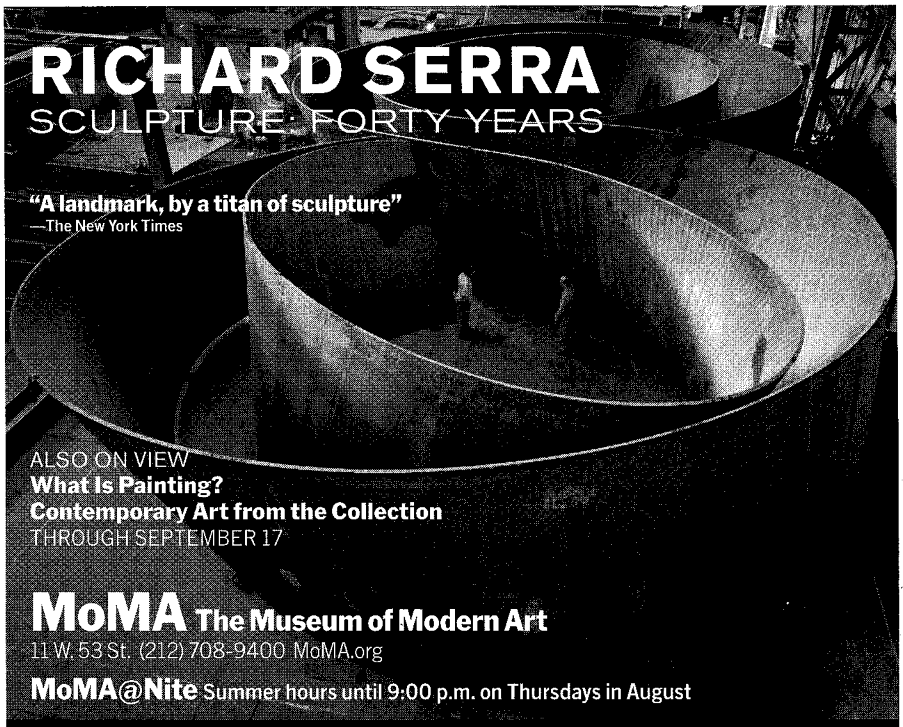
One morning last October, the Mastri Oleari's olive-oil tasting panel—six men and three women—conducted a test of five premium oils, all known to be extra-virgin. The test was a training exercise, one of about twenty that the panelists perform each year to keep their tasting skills sharp. (The panel, along with nineteen others in Italy, recently lost its E.U. accreditation, after the International Olive Oil Council suffered budget cuts and decided that it would no longer certify panels run by private institutions.) The Mastri Oleari's tasting room consisted of eight cubicles, which isolate panel members to prevent them from influencing one another's judgments. (The panel leader, who coördinates the team, often does not taste the oils.) Each cubicle contained a sink, several tulip-shaped tasting glasses with lids to trap aromas, and a yogurt-maker with a thermostat, used to warm the glasses to twenty-eight degrees Celsius, the temperature at which the aromatic substances in the oil are volatilized, making it optimum for tasting.

By 10 A.M., the panel members had arrived, grumbling about having been deprived of their morning coffee and cigarettes, which are forbidden before a tasting, because they dull the senses. The group included, in addition to Zaramella, a thirty-three-year-old olive miller from Lake Garda and a forty-seven-year-old Tuscan marquess who worked as a personal motivation coach. After Zaramella's assistant had poured the oil samples into the tulip glasses and warmed them, the panelists entered their cubicles. Cradling the glasses containing the first sample in their palms to keep the oil warm, they removed the lids, inserted their noses, and snuffled loudly, some closing their eyes. They sipped the oil, and began sucking in air violently, a technique known as *strippaggio*, which coats the taste buds with oil and helps its aromas ascend to the nasal passages. After the first volcanic slurps, the *strippaggi* grew softer and more meditative, and took on personal notes, the marquess's wheezy and almost wistful, Zaramella's deep and wet, as if he were gargling Epsom salts.

The tasters remained in their cubicles for the next hour, snuffling and slurping, and periodically cleansing their palates with mineral water. After sampling each oil, they rated its tastes, aromas, texture, and other characteristics on a scoring sheet. The panel's leader, Alfredo Mancianti, collated the sheets, and assigned a score to each oil based on the tasters' judgments. The Mastri Oleari panelists were remarkably consistent, agreeing not only on the subtle flavors—artichoke, fresh-cut grass, green tomato, kiwi—suggested by the oils but also on their intensity.

Even the most creative criminals have difficulty outwitting a properly trained tasting panel. "It's like a machine," Zaramella told me. "When I see that the oil is peppery, bitter, and smells of olives, rest assured that everything else is automatic." And yet, according to Zaramella, Italian authorities rarely perform panel tests, and almost never on oil before it is sold. When oil fails a taste test, producers often successfully appeal the verdict by arguing that the samples were incorrectly collected or stored, or they secure a favorable judgment from a more permissive panel. In Italy, eight of the nine remaining panels of record—those empowered to pronounce legally binding opinions on olive-oil quality—belong to national government agencies. The only panel of record that does not belong to a national body, in Florence, curtailed its taste-testing activities in 2004, after it and two other local panels determined that extra-virgin oils made by Carapelli, Bertolli, Rubino, and other leading Italian brands were in fact virgin or *lampante*, and one of the panels was sued by Carapelli. (A Florence court threw out the case.)

Olive-oil fraud was already common in antiquity. Galen tells of unscrupulous oil merchants who mixed high-quality olive oil with cheaper substances like lard, and Apicius provides a recipe for turning cheap Spanish oil into prized oil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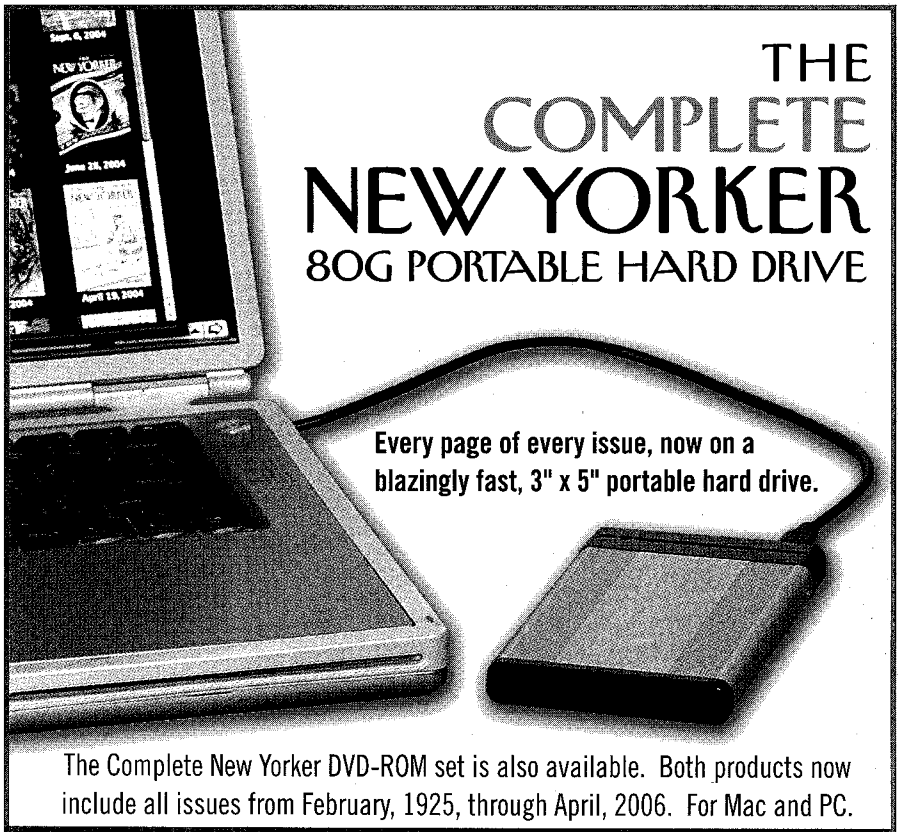
Richard Serra. **Sequence.** 2006. Weatherproof steel. Collection of the artist. Photo: Lorenz Kienzle. © 2007 Richard Serra / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York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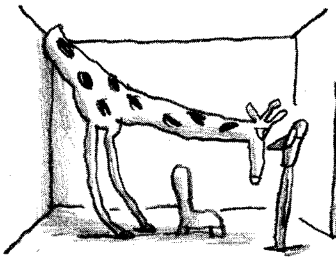
from Istria using minced herbs and roots. The Greeks and the Romans used olive oil as food, soap, lotion, fuel for lamps and furnaces, a base for perfumes, and a cure for heart ailments, stomach aches, hair loss, and excessive perspiration. They also considered it a sacred substance; cult statues, like the effigy of Zeus at Olympia, were rubbed regularly with oil. People who bathed or exercised in Greek gymnasiums anointed their bodies as well, using oils that were scented with pressed flowers and roots. Some scholars link the central place of olive oil in Greek sports, which were performed in the nude, with the rise of bronze statuary in the sixth century B.C. "A tanned athlete, shining in the summer sun, covered with oil, would really resemble a statue of the gods," Nigel Kennell, a specialist in ancient history at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, said. Belief in the sacred, health-giving properties of olive oil continued in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. "Christ" is from the Greek *christos*, meaning "the anointed one"—anointed with olive oil.

By the first century A.D., olives were a cash crop in the Roman Empire; in some regions, per-capita consumption of olive oil was as much as fifty litres a year. "People were prepared to spend the same amount of money on olive oil back then as they do on petroleum today," Kennell said. "And governments went to great lengths to insure a steady supply of it." The family of Septimius Severus, who was emperor from 193 to 211, grew rich on oil in Leptis Magna, a city in the Tripolitania region of North Africa (now Libya). "I've always thought of him as somewhat parallel to an oil sheikh," David Mattingly, a professor of Roman archeology at the University of Leicester who studies Roman olive cultivation, told me. Severus introduced the first regular free distribution of olive oil in Rome—what might be called the bread-and-circuses-and-olive-oil approach to wooing the masses. The emperors Trajan and Hadrian were from the Baetica region of southern Spain (now Andalusia), and their accession triggered a boom in Baetica olive-oil exports. So much Baetica oil was sent to Rome that the amphorae in which it was transported, disposed of at a dump at the southeastern edge of the city, grew to a hill fifty metres high, known today as Monte Testaccio, or Mt. Potsherd.

The amphorae show evidence of extensive anti-fraud measures: each was painted with the exact weight of oil it contained, along with the name of the farm where the olives were pressed, the merchant who shipped the oil, and the official who verified this information before shipment. Reverse checks were presumably performed at Monte Testaccio when the amphorae were emptied, to confirm that the weight and quality had not changed during shipment. "The biggest danger was that merchants would substitute an inferior product en route, and the explicit labelling of goods was clearly designed to counter this," Mattingly said.

In other words, the ancient Romans anticipated fraud of the kind perpetrated by Domenico Ribatti, and took more effective steps to prevent it than Italians do today. In April, Paolo De Castro, the agriculture minister, announced that the government had investigated seven hundred and eighty-seven olive-oil producers and found that two hundred and five were guilty of adulteration, false labelling, and other infractions. Yet it will be years before the cases are adjudicated, and most of the alleged violations are unlikely to result in substantial fines or jail sentences. De Castro has also proposed legislation that would require bottlers of extra-virgin and virgin oil to declare on their labels the oil's country or countries of origin. But many observers believe that the legislation, known as the "Made in Italy" decree, contradicts existing E.U. regulations and will be struck down. "This decree is nothing but a cunning trick intended to pass back through the window what the E.U. has already tossed out the door," Giorgio Fontana, a lawyer who has studied olive-oil legislation, says.

In March, 1993, Domenico Ribatti was arrested, along with his chief chemist and three other accomplices, and charged with contraband, fraud against the European Union, operating a criminal net-



work, and other crimes. During an extended legal battle, he insisted that he had been defrauded by his suppliers—Caribbean shell companies that had sold Riolio hazelnut oil instead of olive oil. But when Pascal Brugger, a Swiss financier who managed these companies, turned state's evidence, and revealed that Ribatti himself controlled them, his defense collapsed. In the end, Ribatti plea-bargained a thirteen-month prison term. (Ribatti, who has since left the olive-oil business, denied that he had committed any crimes. "I was just the scapegoat," he told me.)

Leonardo Colavita, the president of ASSITOL, the olive-oil trade association, and the owner of Colavita, the olive-oil company, told me that the group's policy is to expel member companies that are accused of illegal activity, so that, as he put it, "no one can attack us, no one can say, 'You have criminals in your organization!' " According to Colavita, when Ribatti resigned from the organization he said, "If I leave, everybody's got to leave." Using the diminutive of Ribatti's name, Colavita said, "Mimmo Ribatti was a gentleman, because he didn't name names. If he had named names, a lot of folks would have gone to jail."

While investigating Ribatti, the E.U. anti-fraud team discovered that the two tankers he had used had also transported contraband olive oil to the port of Monopoli, in Puglia. The team traced the oil to an acquaintance of Ribatti's named Leonardo Marseglia, the managing director of an olive-oil and vegetable-oil company in Monopoli. The company, now called Casa Olearia Italiana, became one of the leading olive-oil importers in Europe and owns one of the largest edible-oil refineries in the world.

In 1994, eighty agents from the Guardia di Finanza raided Casa Olearia and seized documents detailing four illegal shipments of oil involving the Mazal II and the Katerina T. In July, 1996, an arrest warrant was issued for Marseglia and sixteen business associates, on charges that included contraband, E.U. tax fraud, and operating a criminal network. Three weeks later, Marseglia, accompanied by his lawyer, surrendered to the authorities and was jailed. Prosecutors accused him of importing Tunisian olive oil falsely identified as a product of Europe, thus evading the duty imposed on non-European goods, and of illegally receiving E.U. olive-oil subsidies when, later, he sold the oil. Domenico Seccia, the prosecutor in the case, who also prosecuted Ribatti, believes that Marseglia taught Ribatti the criminal techniques for which Ribatti was eventually convicted. "Ribatti inherited from Marseglia all the methods and procedures of the fraud," Seccia told me. "The Marseglia case is identical to Ribatti's."

In a ruling on January 13, 1997, Italy's Supreme Court noted that the magistrate who authorized the arrests of Marseglia and his associates had "amply demonstrated, with documentary evidence, that the product unloaded in Monopoli was extra-EC olive oil from Tunisia, free from import tariffs, which was subsequently made to appear to be Italian olive oil using false sales transactions, resulting in serious EC fraud." The court also noted that the magistrate had ordered the men's arrests because of what he considered "the concrete risk that similar activities would be repeated," and because of the "criminal character of the defendants." Nonetheless, after years of judicial wrangling, the prosecutors were unable to win convictions, and the charges against Marseglia and his associates were dismissed in 2004, when the statute of limitations in their cases expired.

Last December, I travelled to Monopoli to visit Marseglia at Casa Olearia. Driving south from the airport in Bari, I followed the coastal highway through ancient olive groves, where the trees are of the local *ogliarola* cultivar, some of them nearly a thousand years old. Since 1994, Antonio Barile, the farmers'-union president, has led tens of thousands of olive farmers in blockades of the ports of Monopoli and Bari, where many tankers carrying oil arrive. Barile said that some oil shipments entering Italy with government approval are in violation of European law, which allows oil to be imported from countries outside the E.U. when local supplies cannot meet demand. So much of this cheaper foreign oil enters the local market that, for example, according to investigators at the Guardia di Finanza, only one per cent of the oil made in Puglia during the 2003-04 harvest and intended for sale in Italy actually sold at a profit for local producers.

At Monopoli, the highway skirts the

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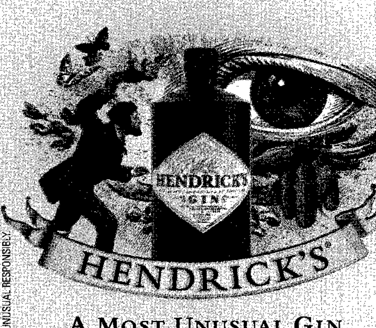

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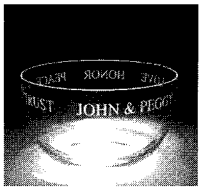

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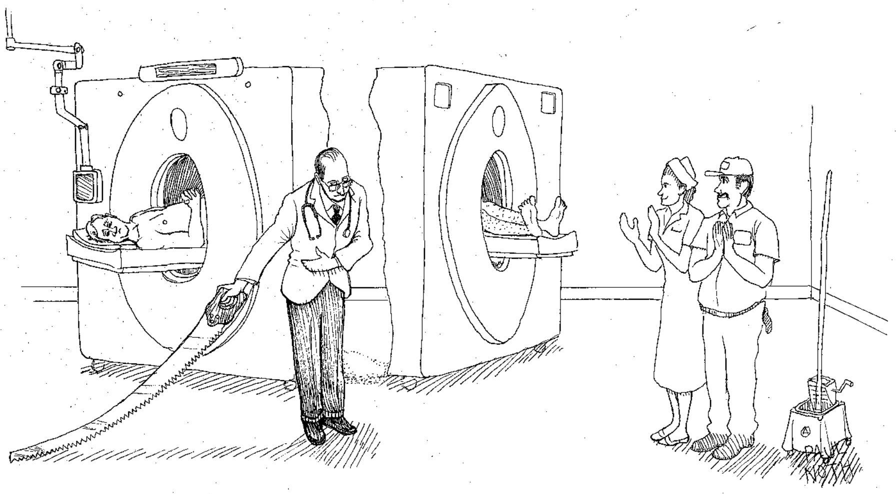

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Casa Olearia plant: stainless-steel silos, office buildings, smokestacks, and warehouses set, incongruously, in a grove of huge olive trees. Since Marseglia bought the complex, in 1981, it has grown fifteenfold; in 2005, the company processed about a million tons of olive oil and vegetable oils. The Italian press has called Marseglia, who began his career driving a delivery truck for his family's olive-oil company, the "baron of extra-virgin." Nonetheless, last year Marseglia left the olive-oil business to concentrate on making biodiesel fuels and electricity. In these fields, he told me, the authorities "break your balls less."

Marseglia is sixty-one, and has the powerful frame, thick neck, and heavy-lidded eyes of an aging prizefighter. Despite a habit of referring to himself in the first-person plural, he is disarmingly informal; he prodded my arm companionably from time to time to emphasize a point. I asked him whether he was guilty of any of the crimes with which he had been charged. "We have never been convicted of anything up to this point," he replied. "Therefore we don't think there's anything to add. We have suffered trials, and we have been acquitted because the events did not take place." He added that he had earned the resentment of local farmers by importing foreign olive oil, which is necessary, he insisted, not only to satisfy Italy's internal demand but also to bolster the shoddy quality of some of the local *pugliese* oil. "You have to import six hundred thousand to seven hundred thousand tons a year," he said. "And since we imported a lot, to make blends to save many bad, smelly local oils, people basically saw it as an affront." (Marseglia denied that he has ever adulterated his olive oil with other vegetable oils.)

Marseglia estimated that ninety per cent of oil sold in Italy as extra-virgin isn't of premium grade. "It's anything but extra-virgin, the oil we have here," he said. He did not seem to think that this was a problem. "First of all, let's give people good oil," he said. "Then the excellent—all the extraordinary stuff at forty or fifty euros a kilo, which a few idiots in the world can afford—we'll think about that later, no?" He told me that his family uses ordinary oil: "For us, the concept of 'good' is enough. We want to be average folks."

Over lunch in the Casa Olearia canteen, Marseglia showed me what he meant by good oil. Techniques like *strippaggio* are "all hot air," he said. "Tasting a plate of pasta is easy. Tasting a glass of wine is easy. Tasting a piece of fruit is easy. Tasting oil is the same. It has to have the same pleasurable tastes. If it has an unpleasant one, it's not good—that's pretty simple. They say you need a lot of knowledge to understand it, because they want to make the subject seem more intellectual."

He reached across the table for a bottle of Giusto, his company's supermarket label, unscrewed the cap, and pointed it at me. "Smell this. Does it smell good, or stink?"

It smelled good: a tart, intensely green fragrance that I'd come to associate with *coratina*, a popular olive cultivar in Puglia.

Marseglia brought the bottle to his lips and tipped in two big glugs. "So you put it in your mouth, right?" he said thickly, through the oil. "Either it's disgusting, and you spit it in somebody's face, or it's good." The sign of a good oil, he went on, is the *bocca bella* ("pretty mouth"), the pleasant taste and sensation that remains in the mouth after you've swallowed the oil.

Marseglia passed me the bottle. "Now you taste it, without doing what those other guys do," he said. "Pretend you're eating a candy, something good. Then we'll see how it leaves your mouth." He watched my face intently as I swallowed the oil, then nodded, satisfied. "Tasting things is simple," he said.

In January, Marseglia was arraigned on charges relating to another olive-oil crime, this one involving the United States. According to documents compiled by investigators of the Guardia di Finanza, between 1998 and 2004 Casa Olearia evaded more than twenty-two million euros (about thirty million dollars) in E.U. duties by illegally importing seventeen thousand tons of Turkish and Tunisian olive oil, apparently with the coöperation of Italian customs officials. E.U. law allows non-European companies to ship oil duty-free to Italy for processing by an Italian company; however, investigators say that Agri-America, the American firm that Casa Olearia claims imported the oil, was a shell company created by Marseglia in order to evade customs duties. The oil was processed in the Casa Olearia laboratories, where investigators suspect that it was mixed with other vegetable oils, though they have been unable to prove this. Some of the oil was bought by Italian companies, but the bulk was shipped to distributors in the United States, who sold it as Italian olive oil.

The American market, which is worth about one and a half billion dollars, is the largest outside Europe, and is growing at a rate of ten per cent a year. Yet the Food and Drug Administration considers olive-oil fraud a relatively rare problem and does not routinely test oils for adulteration. Instead, the agency relies on major producers and trade groups, like the North American Olive Oil Association—whose members include several companies that also belong to ASSI-

TOL—to alert it to suspicious products. With the industry acting as a watchdog, Martin Stutsman, a specialist in adulterated food at the F.D.A., told me, "you don't waste your resources on surveys that are likely to make somebody comfortable but that don't do much toward protecting the public health."

In February, 2006, federal marshals seized about sixty-one thousand litres of what was supposedly extra-virgin olive oil and twenty-six thousand litres of a lower-grade olive oil from a New Jersey warehouse. Some of the oil, which consisted almost entirely of soybean oil, was destined for a company called Krinos Foods, a member of the North American Olive Oil Association. Krinos blamed the fraud on its supplier, DMK Global Marketing, which in turn blamed the Italian bottlers from whom it had bought the oil. The marshals destroyed the oil, but no criminal charges were brought against Krinos or any other companies. "My experience over a period of some fifty years suggests that we can always expect adulteration and mislabelling of olive-oil products in the absence of surveillance by official sources," David Firestone, an F.D.A. chemist who was the agency's olive-oil specialist from the mid-sixties to 1999, told me.

In September, Marseglia and five associates will be tried at a closed hearing in Puglia for their role in the AgriAmerica case. They have been charged with forming a criminal network for the purpose of committing contraband, but an investigator familiar with the case says that Marseglia is unlikely to be convicted. "He has protection at the highest levels, from right to left across the political spectrum," the investigator told me. (Marseglia, citing the ongoing nature of the case, declined to comment on the charges against him but said that he expected to be found innocent, as he had been in previous investigations.)

Casa Olearia remains a member of ASSITOL, which has considerable influence in both Rome and Brussels. The Italian government's Technical Commission of Oils and Fats, a group that helps draft olive-oil regulations, includes several heads of laboratories belonging to ASSITOL members; its chair is Enrico Tiscornia, a longtime scientific consultant to ASSITOL, who also serves on an analogous board in Brussels. Moreover, ASSITOL recently collaborated with the Italian Ministry of Agriculture on a proposal to create a "Mediterranean Axis of Olive Oil," which a 2004 government document described as "an informal cartel of international dimensions among olive-oil producers." According to Colavita, ASSITOL's president, the project was initiated by Giovanni Alemanno, the agriculture minister from 2001 to 2006, and would be financed by the Italian government. The goal, he said, was to expand olive-oil production in Syria, Morocco, Turkey, and other southern Mediterranean countries outside the E.U., and to facilitate the sale of the oil in Italy, using a duty-free storage facility in a southern Italian port.

Paolo De Castro, who replaced Alemanno as agriculture minister last year, told me that he was unfamiliar with the project. But when I described it to him he said that he supported its aims. "We have to avoid distortions, not place limits on business," he told me. "The important thing is that people don't act like wise guys, and that this Tunisian oil doesn't become extra-virgin olive oil from Puglia. Now, this is quite a little problem, eh?" De Castro added that his "Made in Italy" decree, which would require distributors to declare the provenance of their oil on labels, would prevent them from misleading the public. "You write it, and there's no problem," he said.

Leonardo Marseglia dismissed the notion that such a measure could be effective. "Oil doesn't have an identity card; it just goes," he said. "When someone has two silos of oil, one Italian and the other foreign, you just have to switch them: the other one becomes Italian oil, this one becomes foreign." Noting that oils labelled "Made in Italy" sell for more than other oils, Marseglia said that De Castro's legislation would only inspire more fraud. "So what's going to happen? They'll do another swindle, and behind the mask of 'Made in Italy' there's foreign oil labelled 'Made in Italy.' " Leonardo Colavita is equally skeptical: "I say that a criminal ought to make the law, because the criminal knows how to outwit the law." ♦

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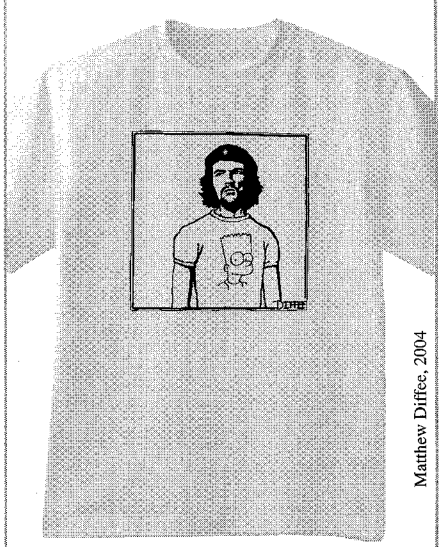

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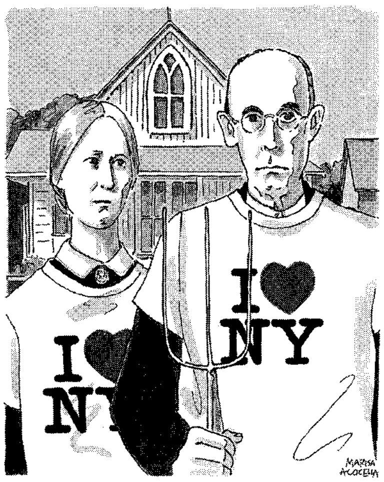

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE BLACK SITES

A rare look inside the C.I.A.'s secret interrogation program.

BY JANE MAYER

In March, Mariane Pearl, the widow of the murdered *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, received a phone call from Alberto Gonzales, the Attorney General. At the time, Gonzales's role in the controversial dismissal of eight United States Attorneys had just been exposed, and the story was becoming a scandal in Washington. Gonzales informed Pearl that the Justice Department was about to announce some good news: a terrorist in U.S. custody—Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the Al Qaeda leader who was the primary architect of the September 11th attacks—had confessed to killing her husband. (Pearl was abducted and beheaded five and a half years ago in Pakistan, by unidentified Islamic militants.) The Administration planned to release a transcript in which Mohammed boasted, "I decapitated with my blessed right hand the head of the American Jew Daniel Pearl in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. For those who would like to confirm, there are pictures of me on the Internet holding his head."

Pearl was taken aback. In 2003, she had received a call from Condoleezza Rice, who was then President Bush's national-security adviser, informing her of the same news. But Rice's revelation had been secret. Gonzales's announcement seemed like a publicity stunt. Pearl asked him if he had proof that Mohammed's confession was truthful; Gonzales claimed to have corroborating evidence but wouldn't share it. "It's not enough for officials to call me and say they believe it," Pearl said. "You need evidence." (Gonzales did not respond to requests for comment.)

The circumstances surrounding the confession of Mohammed, whom law-enforcement officials refer to as K.S.M., were perplexing. He had no lawyer. After his capture in Pakistan, in March of 2003, the Central Intelligence Agency had detained him in undisclosed locations for more than two years; last fall, he was transferred to military custody in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. There were no named witnesses to his initial confession, and no solid information about what form of interrogation might have prodded him to talk, although reports had been published, in the *Times* and elsewhere, suggesting that C.I.A. officers had tortured him. At a hearing held at Guantánamo, Mohammed said that his testimony was freely given, but he also indicated that he had been abused by the C.I.A. (The Pentagon had classified as "top secret" a statement he had written detailing the alleged mistreatment.) And although Mohammed said that there were photographs confirming his guilt, U.S. authorities had found none. Instead, they had a copy of the video that had been released on the Internet, which showed the killer's arms but offered no other clues to his identity.

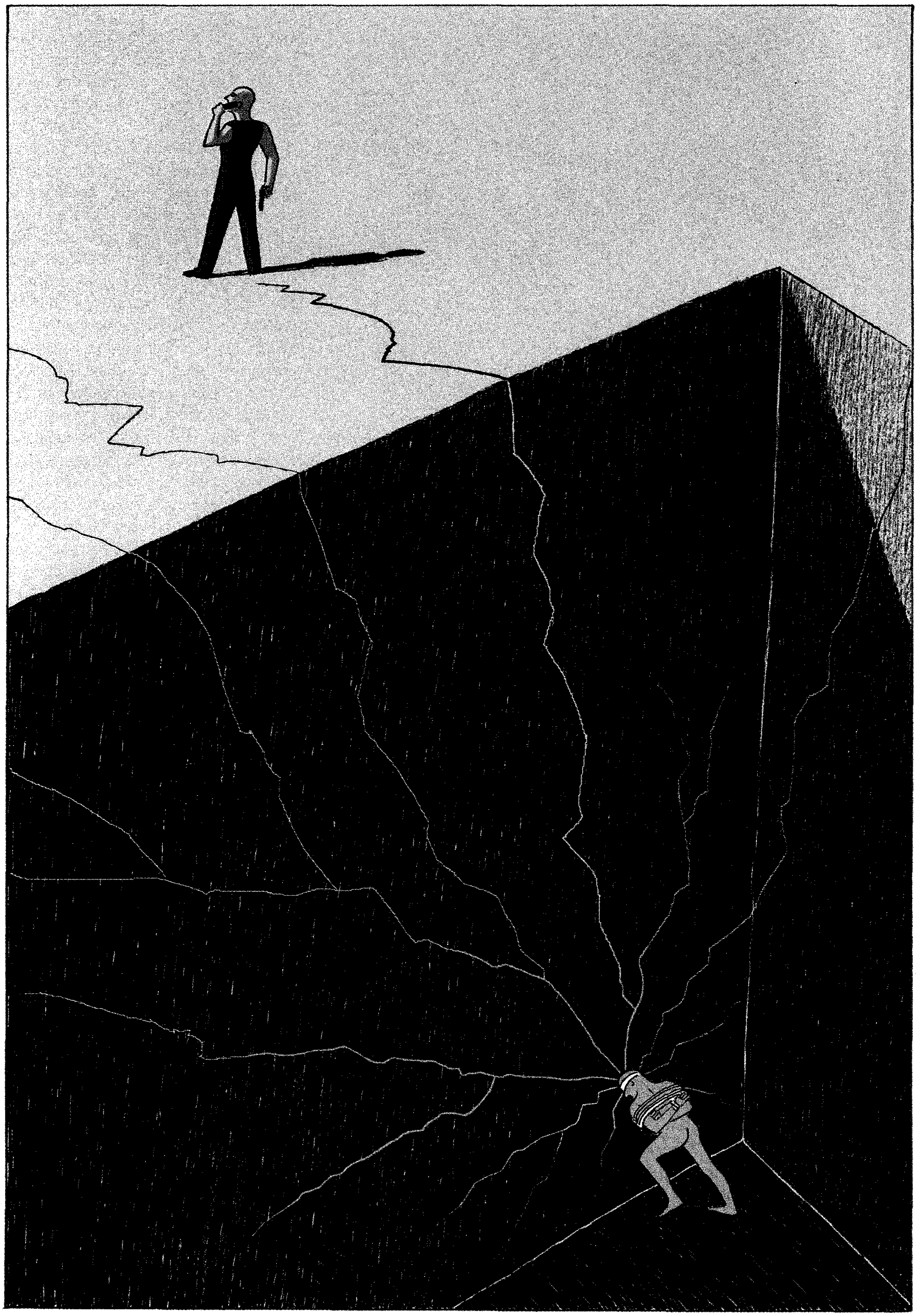
Further confusing matters, a Pakistani named Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh had already been convicted of the abduction and murder, in 2002. A British-educated terrorist who had a history of staging kidnappings, he had been sentenced to death in Pakistan for the crime. But the Pakistani government, not known for its leniency, had stayed his execution. Indeed, hearings on the matter had been delayed a remarkable number of times—at least thirty—possibly because of his reported ties to the Pakistani intelligence service, which may have helped free him after he was imprisoned for terrorist activities in India. Mohammed's confession would delay the execution further, since, under Pakistani law, any new evidence is grounds for appeal.

A surprising number of people close to the case are dubious of Mohammed's confession. A longtime friend of Pearl's, the former *Journal* reporter Asra Nomani, said, "The release of the confession came right in the midst of the U.S. Attorney scandal. There was a drumbeat for Gonzales's resignation. It seemed like a calculated strategy to change the subject. Why now? They'd had the confession for years." Mariane and Daniel Pearl were staying in Nomani's Karachi house at the time of his murder, and Nomani has followed the case meticulously; this fall, she plans to teach a course on the topic at Georgetown University. She said, "I don't think this confession resolves the case. You can't have justice from one person's confession, especially under such unusual circumstances. To me, it's not convincing." She added, "I called all the investigators. They weren't just skeptical—they didn't believe it."

Special Agent Randall Bennett, the head of security for the U.S. consulate in Karachi when Pearl was killed—and whose lead role investigating the murder was featured in the recent film "A Mighty Heart"—said that he has interviewed all the convicted accomplices who are now in custody in Pakistan, and that none of them named Mohammed as playing a role. "K.S.M.'s name never came up," he said. Robert Baer, a former C.I.A. officer, said, "My old colleagues say with one-hundred-per-cent certainty that it was not K.S.M. who killed Pearl." A government official involved in the case said, "The fear is that K.S.M. is covering up for others, and that these people will be released." And Judea Pearl, Daniel's father, said, "Something is fishy. There are a lot of unanswered questions. K.S.M. can say he killed Jesus—he has nothing to lose."

Mariane Pearl, who is relying on the Bush Administration to bring justice in her husband's case, spoke carefully about the investigation. "You need a procedure

In the war on terror, one historian says, the C.I.A. "didn't just bring back the old psychological techniques—they perfected them."



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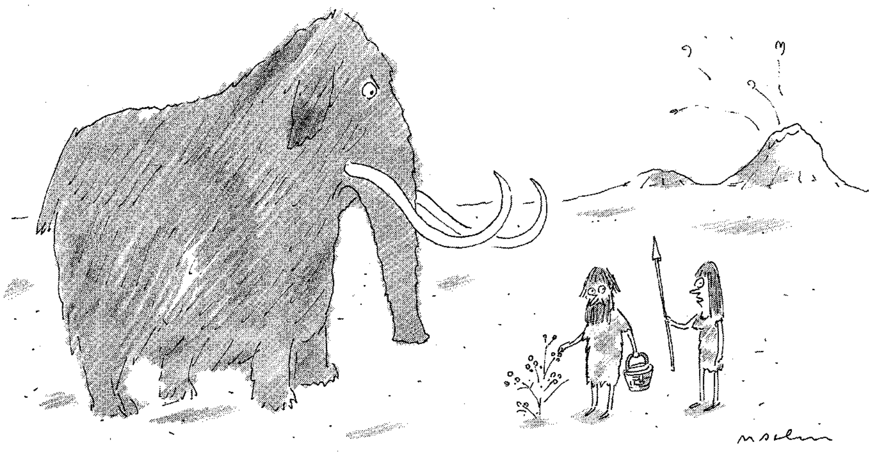

"On second thought—you hunt, I'll gather."

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that will get the truth," she said. "An intelligence agency is not supposed to be above the law."

Mohammed's interrogation was part of a secret C.I.A. program, initiated after September 11th, in which terrorist suspects such as Mohammed were detained in "black sites"—secret prisons outside the United States—and subjected to unusually harsh treatment. The program was effectively suspended last fall, when President Bush announced that he was emptying the C.I.A.'s prisons and transferring the detainees to military custody in Guantánamo. This move followed a Supreme Court ruling, Hamdan v. Rumsfeld, which found that all detainees—including those held by the C.I.A.—had to be treated in a manner consistent with the Geneva Conventions. These treaties, adopted in 1949, bar cruel treatment, degradation, and torture. In late July, the White House issued an executive order promising that the C.I.A. would adjust its methods in order to meet the Geneva standards. At the same time, Bush's order pointedly did not disavow the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" that would likely be found illegal if used by officials inside the United States. The executive order means that the agency can once again hold foreign terror suspects indefinitely, and without charges, in black sites, without notifying their families or local authorities, or offering access to legal counsel.

The C.I.A.'s director, General Michael Hayden, has said that the program, which is designed to extract intelligence from suspects quickly, is an "irreplaceable" tool for combatting terrorism. And President Bush has said that "this program has given us information that has saved innocent lives, by helping us stop new attacks." He claims that it has contributed to the disruption of at least ten serious Al Qaeda plots since September 11th, three of them inside the United States.

According to the Bush Administration, Mohammed divulged information of tremendous value during his detention. He is said to have helped point the way to the capture of Hambali, the Indonesian terrorist responsible for the 2002 bombings of night clubs in Bali. He also provided information on an Al Qaeda leader in England. Michael Sheehan, a former counterterrorism official at the State Department, said, "K.S.M. is the poster boy for using tough but legal tactics. He's the reason these techniques exist. You can save lives with the kind of information he could give up." Yet Mohammed's confessions may also have muddled some key investigations. Perhaps under duress, he claimed involvement in thirty-one criminal plots—an improbable number, even for a high-level terrorist. Critics say that Mohammed's case illustrates the cost of the C.I.A.'s desire for swift intelligence. Colonel Dwight Sullivan, the top defense lawyer at the Pentagon's Office of Military Commissions, which is expected eventually to try Mohammed for war crimes, called his serial confessions "a textbook example of why we shouldn't allow coercive methods."

The Bush Administration has gone to great lengths to keep secret the treatment of the hundred or so "high-value detainees" whom the C.I.A. has confined, at one point or another, since September 11th. The program has been extraordinarily "compartmentalized," in the nomenclature of the intelligence world. By design, there has been virtually no access for outsiders to the C.I.A.'s prisoners. The utter isolation of these detainees has been described as essential to America's national security. The Justice Department argued this point explicitly last November, in the case of a Baltimore-area resident named Majid Khan, who was held for more than three years by the C.I.A. Khan, the government said, had to be prohibited from access to a lawyer specifically because he might describe the "alternative interrogation methods" that the agency had used when questioning him. These methods amounted to a state secret, the government argued, and disclosure of them could "reasonably be expected to cause extremely grave damage." (The case has not yet been decided.)

Given this level of secrecy, the public and all but a few members of Congress who have been sworn to silence have had to take on faith President Bush's assurances that the C.I.A.'s internment program has been humane and legal, and has yielded crucial intelligence. Representative Alcee Hastings, a Democratic member of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, said, "We talk to the authorities about these detainees, but, of course, they're not going to come out and tell us that they beat the living daylights out of someone." He recalled learning in 2003 that Mohammed had been captured. "It was good news," he said. "So I tried to find out: Where is this guy? And how is he being treated?" For more than three years, Hastings said, "I could never pinpoint anything." Finally, he received some classified briefings on the Mohammed interrogation. Hastings said that he "can't go into details" about what he found out, but, speaking of Mohammed's treatment, he said that even if it wasn't torture, as the Administration claims, "it ain't right, either. Something went wrong."

Since the drafting of the Geneva Conventions, the International Committee of the Red Cross has played a special role in safeguarding the rights of prisoners of war. For decades, governments have allowed officials from the organization to report on the treatment of detainees, to insure that standards set by international treaties are being maintained. The Red Cross, however, was unable to get access to the C.I.A.'s prisoners for five years. Finally, last year, Red Cross officials were allowed to interview fifteen detainees, after they had been transferred to Guantánamo. One of the prisoners was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. What the Red Cross learned has been kept from the public. The committee believes that its continued access to prisoners worldwide is contingent upon confidentiality, and therefore it addresses violations privately with the authorities directly responsible for prisoner treatment and detention. For this reason, Simon Schorno, a Red Cross spokesman in Washington, said, "The I.C.R.C. does not comment on its findings publicly. Its work is confidential."

The public-affairs office at the C.I.A. and officials at the congressional intelligence-oversight committees would not even acknowledge the existence of the report. Among the few people who are believed to have seen it are Condoleezza Rice, now the Secretary of State; Stephen Hadley, the national-security adviser; John Bellinger III, the Secretary of State's legal adviser; Hayden; and John Rizzo, the agency's acting general counsel. Some members of the Senate and House intelligence-oversight committees are also believed to have had limited access to the report.

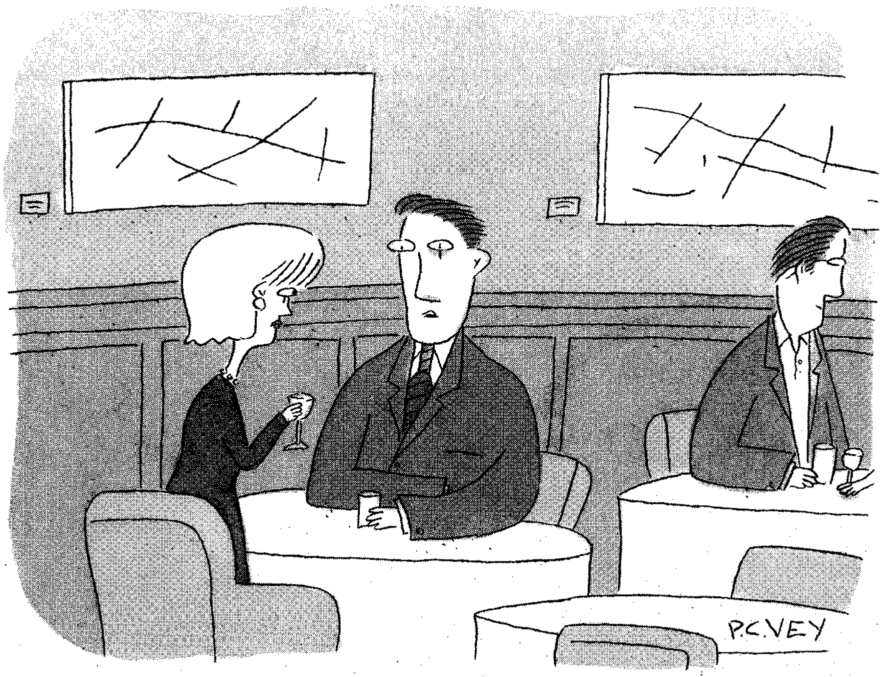
Confidentiality may be particularly stringent in this case. Congressional and other Washington sources familiar with the report said that it harshly criticized the C.I.A.'s practices. One of the sources said that the Red Cross described the agency's detention and interrogation methods as tantamount to torture, and declared that American officials responsible for the abusive treatment could have committed serious crimes. The source said the report warned that these officials may have committed "grave breaches" of the Geneva Conventions, and may have violated the U.S. Torture Act, which Congress passed in 1994. The conclusions of the Red Cross, which is known for its credibility and caution, could have potentially devastating legal ramifications.

Concern about the legality of the C.I.A.'s program reached a previously unreported breaking point last week when Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat on the intelligence committee, quietly put a "hold" on the confirmation of John Rizzo, who as acting general counsel was deeply involved in establishing the agency's interrogation and detention policies. Wyden's maneuver essentially stops the nomination from going forward. "I question if there's been adequate legal oversight," Wyden told me. He said that after studying a classified addendum to President Bush's new executive order, which specifies permissible treatment of detainees, "I am not convinced that all of these techniques are either effective or legal. I don't want to see well-intentioned C.I.A. officers breaking the law because of shaky legal guidance."

A former C.I.A. officer, who supports the agency's detention and interrogation policies, said he worried that, if the full story of the C.I.A. program ever surfaced, agency personnel could face criminal prosecution. Within the agency, he said, there is a "high level of anxiety about political retribution" for the interrogation program. If congressional hearings begin, he said, "several guys expect to be thrown under the bus." He noted that a number of C.I.A. officers have taken out professional liability insurance, to help with potential legal fees.

Paul Gimigliano, a spokesman for the C.I.A., denied any legal impropriety, stressing that "the agency's terrorist-detention program has been implemented lawfully. And torture is illegal under U.S. law. The people who have been part of this important effort are well-trained, seasoned professionals." This spring, the Associated Press published an article quoting the chairman of the House intelligence committee, Silvestre Reyes, who said that Hayden, the C.I.A. director, "vehemently denied" the Red Cross's conclusions. A U.S. official dismissed the Red Cross report as a mere compilation of allegations made by terrorists. And Robert Grenier, a former head of the C.I.A.'s Counterterrorism Center, said that "the C.I.A.'s interrogations were nothing like Abu Ghraib or Guantánamo. They were very, very regimented. Very meticulous." He said, "The program is very careful. It's completely legal."

Accurately or not, Bush Administration officials have described the prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo as the unauthorized actions of ill-trained personnel, eleven of whom have been convicted of crimes. By contrast, the treatment of high-value detainees has been directly, and repeatedly, approved by President Bush. The program is monitored closely by C.I.A. lawyers, and supervised by the agency's director and his subordinates at the Counterterrorism Center. While Mohammed was being held by the agency, detailed dossiers on the treatment of detainees were regularly available to the former C.I.A. director George Tenet, according to informed sources inside and



"If you can just help me through the tough times, I can handle it from there."

outside the agency. Through a spokesperson, Tenet denied making day-to-day decisions about the treatment of individual detainees. But, according to a former agency official, "Every single plan is drawn up by interrogators, and then submitted for approval to the highest possible level—meaning the director of the C.I.A. Any change in the plan—even if an extra day of a certain treatment was added—was signed off by the C.I.A. director."

On September 17, 2001, President Bush signed a secret Presidential finding authorizing the C.I.A. to create paramilitary teams to hunt, capture, detain, or kill designated terrorists almost anywhere in the world. Yet the C.I.A. had virtually no trained interrogators. A former C.I.A. officer involved in fighting terrorism said that, at first, the agency was crippled by its lack of expertise. "It began right away, in Afghanistan, on the fly," he recalled. "They invented the program of interrogation with people who had no understanding of Al Qaeda or the Arab world." The former officer said that the pressure from the White House, in particular from Vice-President Dick Cheney, was intense: "They were pushing us: 'Get information! Do *not* let us get hit again!'" In the scramble, he said, he searched the C.I.A.'s archives, to see what interrogation techniques had worked in the past. He was particularly impressed with the Phoenix Program, from the Vietnam War. Critics, including military historians, have described it as a program of state-sanctioned torture and murder. A Pentagon-contract study found that, between 1970 and 1971, ninety-seven per cent of the Vietcong targeted by the Phoenix Program were of negligible importance. But, after September 11th, some C.I.A. officials viewed the program as a useful model. A. B. Krongard, who was the executive director of the C.I.A. from 2001 to 2004, said that the agency turned to "everyone we could, including our friends in Arab cultures," for interrogation advice, among them those in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, all of which the State Department regularly criticizes for human-rights abuses.

The C.I.A. knew even less about running prisons than it did about hostile interrogations. Tyler Drumheller, a former chief of European operations at the C.I.A., and the author of a recent book, "On the Brink: How the White House Compromised U.S. Intelligence," said, "The agency had no experience in detention. Never. But they insisted on arresting and detaining people in this program. It was a mistake, in my opinion. You can't mix intelligence and police work. But the White House was really pushing. They wanted *someone* to do it. So the C.I.A. said, 'We'll try.' George Tenet came out of politics, not intelligence. His whole modus operandi was to please the principal. We got stuck with all sorts of things. This is really the legacy of a director who never said no to anybody."

Many officials inside the C.I.A. had misgivings. "A lot of us knew this would be a can of worms," the former officer said. "We warned them, It's going to become an atrocious mess." The problem from the start, he said, was that no one had thought through what he called "the disposal plan." He continued, "What are you going to *do* with these people? The utility of someone like K.S.M. is, at most, six months to a year. You exhaust them. Then what? It would have been better if we had executed them."

The C.I.A. program's first important detainee was Abu Zubaydah, a top Al Qaeda operative, who was captured by Pakistani forces in March of 2002. Lacking in-house specialists on interrogation, the agency hired a group of outside contractors, who implemented a regime of techniques that one well-informed former adviser to the American intelligence community described as "a 'Clockwork Orange' kind of approach." The experts were retired military psychologists, and their backgrounds were in training Special Forces soldiers how to survive tor-

Victoria Roberts

"I don't want to say, 'I told you so,' but you've knitted yourself into a corner."

ture, should they ever be captured by enemy states. The program, known as SERE—an acronym for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape—was created at the end of the Korean War. It subjected trainees to simulated torture, including waterboarding (simulated drowning), sleep deprivation, isolation, exposure to temperature extremes, enclosure in tiny spaces, bombardment with agonizing sounds, and religious and sexual humiliation. The SERE program was designed strictly for defense against torture regimes, but the C.I.A.'s new team used its expertise to help interrogators inflict abuse. "They were very arrogant, and pro-torture," a European official knowledgeable about the program said. "They sought to render the detainees vulnerable—to break down all of their senses. It takes a psychologist trained in this to understand these rupturing experiences."

The use of psychologists was also considered a way for C.I.A. officials to skirt measures such as the Convention Against Torture. The former adviser to the intelligence community said, "Clearly, some senior people felt they needed a theory to justify what they were doing. You can't just say, 'We want to do what Egypt's doing.' When the lawyers asked what their basis was, they could say, 'We have Ph.D.s who have these theories.' " He said that, inside the C.I.A., where a number of scientists work, there was strong internal opposition to the new techniques. "Behavioral scientists said, 'Don't even think about this!' They thought officers could be prosecuted."

Nevertheless, the SERE experts' theories were apparently put into practice with Zubaydah's interrogation. Zubaydah told the Red Cross that he was not only waterboarded, as has been previously reported; he was also kept for a prolonged period in a cage, known as a "dog box," which was so small that he could not stand. According to an eyewitness, one psychologist advising on the treatment of Zubaydah, James Mitchell, argued that he needed to be reduced to a state of "learned helplessness." (Mitchell disputes this characterization.)

Steve Kleinman, a reserve Air Force colonel and an experienced interrogator who has known Mitchell professionally for years, said that "learned helplessness was his whole paradigm." Mitchell, he said, "draws a diagram showing what he says is the whole cycle. It starts with isolation. Then they eliminate the prisoners' ability to forecast the future—when their next meal is, when they can go to the bathroom. It creates dread and dependency. It was the K.G.B. model. But the K.G.B. used it to get people who had turned against the state to confess falsely. The K.G.B. wasn't after intelligence."

As the C.I.A. captured and interrogated other Al Qaeda figures, it established a protocol of psychological coercion. The program tied together many strands of the agency's secret history of Cold War-era experiments in behavioral science. (In June, the C.I.A. declassified long-held secret documents known as the Family Jewels, which shed light on C.I.A. drug experiments on rats and monkeys, and on the infamous case of Frank R. Olson, an agency employee who leaped to his death from a hotel window in 1953, nine days after he was unwittingly drugged with LSD.) The C.I.A.'s most useful research focussed on the surprisingly powerful effects of psychological manipulations, such as extreme sensory deprivation. According to Alfred McCoy, a history professor at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison, who has written a history of the C.I.A.'s experiments in coercing subjects, the agency learned that "if subjects are confined without light, odors, sound, or any fixed references of time and place, very deep breakdowns can be provoked."

Agency scientists found that in just a few hours some subjects suspended in water tanks—or confined in isolated rooms wearing blacked-out goggles and earmuffs—regressed to semi-psychotic states. Moreover, McCoy said, detainees become so desperate for human interaction that "they bond with the interrogator like a father, or like a drowning man having a lifesaver thrown at him. If you deprive people of all their senses, they'll turn to you like their daddy." McCoy added that "after the Cold War we put away those tools. There was bipartisan reform. We backed away from those dark days. Then, under the pressure of the war on terror, they didn't just bring back the old psychological techniques—they perfected them."

The C.I.A.'s interrogation program is remarkable for its mechanistic aura. "It's one of the most sophisticated, refined programs of torture ever," an outside expert familiar with the protocol said. "At every stage, there was a rigid attention to detail. Procedure was adhered to almost to the letter. There was top-down quality control, and such a set routine that you get to the point where you know what each detainee is going to say, because you've heard it before. It was almost automated. People were utterly dehumanized. People fell apart. It was the intentional and systematic infliction of great suffering masquerading as a legal process. It is just chilling."

The U.S. government first began tracking Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in 1993, shortly after his nephew Ramzi Yousef blew a gaping hole in the World Trade Center. Mohammed, officials learned, had transferred money to Yousef. Mohammed, born in either 1964 or 1965, was raised in a religious Sunni Muslim family in Kuwait, where his family had migrated from the Baluchistan region of Pakistan. In the mid-eighties, he was trained as a mechanical engineer in the U.S., attending two colleges in North Carolina.

As a teen-ager, Mohammed had been drawn to militant, and increasingly violent, Muslim causes. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood at the age of sixteen, and, after his graduation from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, in Greensboro—where he was remembered as a class clown, but religious enough to forgo meat when eating at Burger King—he signed on with the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, receiving military training and establishing ties with Islamist terrorists. By all accounts, his animus toward the U.S. was rooted in a hatred of Israel.

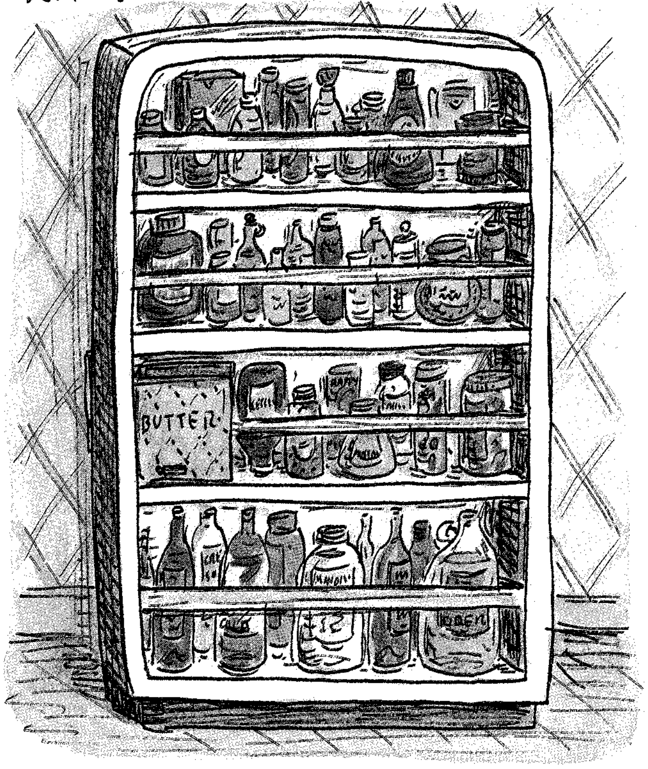
In 1994, Mohammed, who was impressed by Yousef's notoriety after the first World Trade Center bombing, joined him in scheming to blow up twelve U.S. jumbo jets over two days. The so-called Bojinka plot was disrupted in 1995, when Philippine police broke into an apartment that Yousef and other terrorists were sharing in Manila, which was filled with bomb-making materials. At the time of the raid, Mohammed was working in Doha, Qatar, at a government job. The following year, he narrowly escaped capture by F.B.I. officers and slipped into the global jihadist network, where he eventually joined forces with Osama bin Laden, in Afghanistan. Along

SKETCHBOOK BY ROZ CHAST

WELCOME TO
THE MUSEUM OF ONE'S KITCHEN

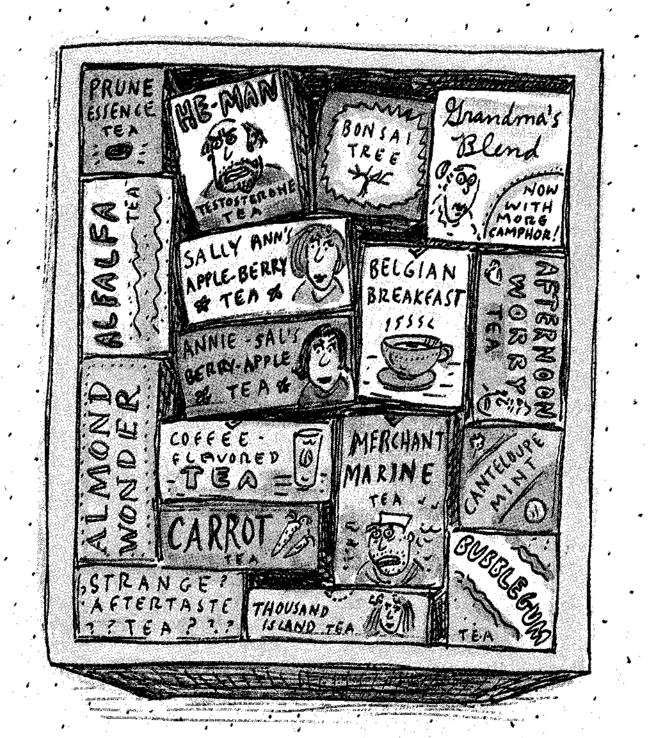
The Refrigerator Door Gallery

Don't try to absorb it all in one visit.



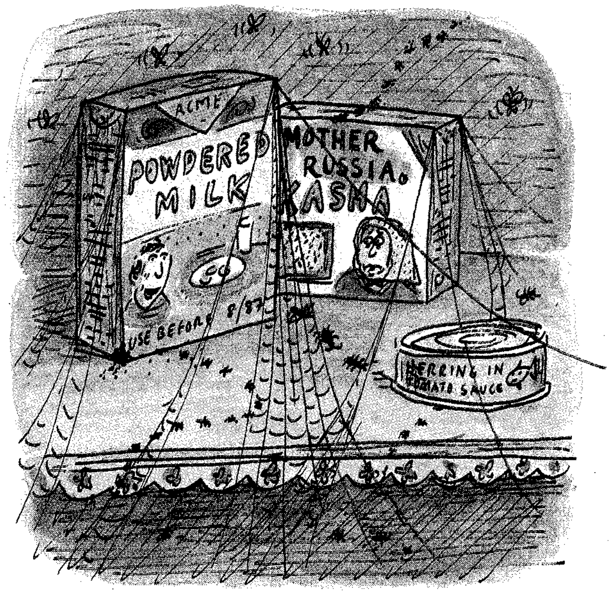
The Cabinet of Too Many Teas

Not even the curator knows why there are so many.


PRUNE ESSENCE TEA
HE-MAN
TESTOSTERONE TEA
BONSAI TREE
Grandma's Blend
NOW WITH MORE CAMPHOR!
ALFALFA TEA
SALLY ANN'S APPLE-BERRY TEA
BELGIAN BREAKFAST
AFTERNOON WORRY TEA
ANNIE-SAL'S BERRY-APPLE TEA
ALMOND WONDER
COFFEE-FLAVORED TEA
MERCHANT MARINE TEA
CANTELOUPE MINT
CARROT TEA
BUBBLEGUM TEA
STRANGE? AFTERTASTE ?? TEA ???
THOUSAND ISLAND TEA

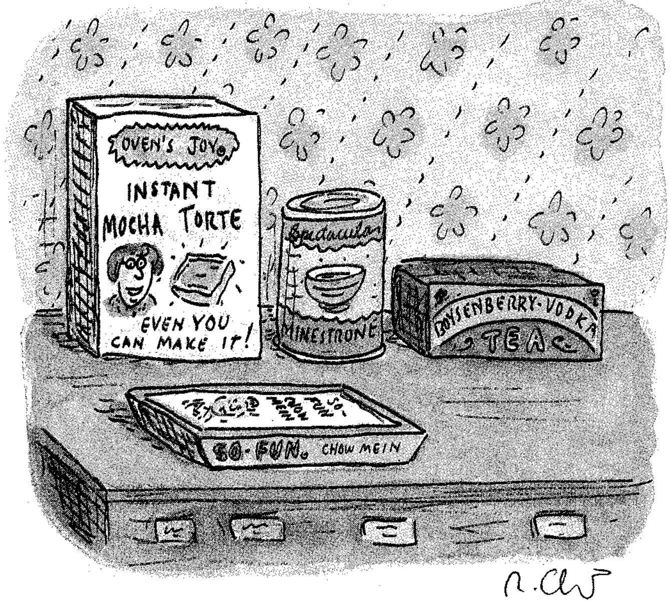
The Shelf of Antiquity

Products from before the dawn of time.


ACME
POWDERED MILK
USE BEFORE 8/87
MOTHER RUSSIA KASHA
HERRING IN TOMATO SAUCE

The Mark and Janine Bostwick Impulse Buy Collection

On exhibit this week.


OVEN'S JOY
INSTANT MOCHA TORTE
EVEN YOU CAN MAKE IT!
Spectacular
MINESTRONE
BOYSENBERRY-VODKA TEA
SO-FUN CHOW MEIN

the way, he married and had children.

Many journalistic accounts have presented Mohammed as a charismatic, swashbuckling figure: in the Philippines, he was said to have flown a helicopter close enough to a girlfriend's office window so that she could see him; in Pakistan, he supposedly posed as an anonymous bystander and gave interviews to news reporters about his nephew's arrest. Neither story is true. But Mohammed did seem to enjoy taunting authorities after the September 11th attacks, which, in his eventual confession, he claimed to have orchestrated "from A to Z." In April, 2002, Mohammed arranged to be interviewed on Al Jazeera by its London bureau chief, Yosri Fouda, and took personal credit for the atrocities. "I am the head of the Al Qaeda military committee," he said. "And yes, we did it." Fouda, who conducted the interview at an Al Qaeda safe house in Karachi, said that he was astounded not only by Mohammed's boasting but also by his seeming imperviousness to the danger of being caught. Mohammed permitted Al Jazeera to reveal that he was hiding out in the Karachi area. When Fouda left the apartment, Mohammed, apparently unarmed, walked him downstairs and out into the street.

In the early months of 2003, U.S. authorities reportedly paid a twenty-five-million-dollar reward for information that led to Mohammed's arrest. U.S. officials closed in on him, at 4 A.M. on March 1st, waking him up in a borrowed apartment in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The officials hung back as Pakistani authorities handcuffed and hooded him, and took him to a safe house. Reportedly, for the first two days, Mohammed robotically recited Koranic verses and refused to divulge much more than his name. A videotape obtained by "60 Minutes" shows Mohammed at the end of this episode, complaining of a head cold; an American voice can be heard in the background. This was the last image of Mohammed to be seen by the public. By March 4th, he was in C.I.A. custody.

Captured along with Mohammed, according to some accounts, was a letter from bin Laden, which may have led officials to think that he knew where the Al Qaeda founder was hiding. If Mohammed did have this crucial information, it was time sensitive—bin Laden never stayed in one place for long—and officials needed to extract it quickly. At the time, many American intelligence officials still feared a "second wave" of Al Qaeda attacks, ratcheting the pressure further.

According to George Tenet's recent memoir, "At the Center of the Storm," Mohammed told his captors that he wouldn't talk until he was given a lawyer in New York, where he assumed he would be taken. (He had been indicted there in connection with the Bojinka plot.) Tenet writes, "Had that happened, I am confident that we would have obtained none of the information he had in his head about imminent threats against the American people." Opponents of the C.I.A.'s approach, however, note that Ramzi Yousef gave a voluminous confession after being read his Miranda rights. "These guys are egomaniacs," a former federal prosecutor said. "They *love* to talk!"

A complete picture of Mohammed's time in secret detention remains elusive. But a partial narrative has emerged through interviews with European and American sources in intelligence, government, and legal circles, as well as with former detainees who have been released from C.I.A. custody. People familiar with Mohammed's allegations about his interrogation, and interrogations of other high-value detainees, describe the accounts as remarkably consistent.

Soon after Mohammed's arrest, sources say, his American captors told him, "We're not going to kill you. But we're going to take you to the very brink of your death and back." He was first taken to a secret U.S.-run prison in Afghanistan. According to a Human Rights Watch report released two years ago, there was a C.I.A.-affiliated black site in Afghanistan by 2002: an underground prison near Kabul International Airport. Distinctive for its absolute lack of light, it was referred to by detainees as the Dark Prison. Another detention facility was reportedly a former brick factory, just north of Kabul, known as the Salt Pit. The latter became infamous for the 2002 death of a detainee, reportedly from hypothermia, after prison officials stripped him naked and chained him to the floor of his concrete cell, in freezing temperatures.

In all likelihood, Mohammed was transported from Pakistan to one of the Afghan sites by a team of black-masked commandos attached to the C.I.A.'s paramilitary Special Activities Division. According to a report adopted in June by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, titled "Secret Detentions and Illegal Transfers of Detainees," detainees were "taken to their cells by strong people who wore black outfits, masks that covered their whole faces, and dark visors over their eyes." (Some personnel reportedly wore black clothes made from specially woven synthetic fabric that couldn't be ripped or torn.) A former member of a C.I.A. transport team has described the "takeout" of prisoners as a carefully choreographed twenty-minute routine, during which a suspect was hog-tied, stripped naked, photographed, hooded, sedated with anal suppositories, placed in diapers, and transported by plane to a secret location.

A person involved in the Council of Europe inquiry, referring to cavity searches and the frequent use of suppositories during the takeout of detainees, likened the treatment to "sodomy." He said, "It was used to absolutely strip the detainee of any dignity. It breaks down someone's sense of impenetrability. The interrogation became a process not just of getting information but of utterly subordinating the detainee through humiliation." The former C.I.A. officer confirmed that the agency frequently photographed the prisoners naked, "because it's demoralizing." The person involved in the Council of Europe inquiry said that photos were also part of the C.I.A.'s quality-control process. They were passed back to case officers for review.

A secret government document, dated December 10, 2002, detailing "SERE Interrogation Standard Operating Procedure," outlines the advantages of stripping detainees. "In addition to degradation of the detainee, stripping can be used to demonstrate the omnipotence of the captor or to debilitate the detainee." The document advises interrogators to "tear clothing from detainees by firmly pulling downward against buttoned buttons and seams. Tearing motions shall be downward to prevent pulling the detainee off balance." The memo also advocates the "Shoulder Slap," "Stomach Slap," "Hooding," "Manhandling," "Walling," and a variety of "Stress Positions," including one called "Worship the Gods."

In the process of being transported,

C.I.A. detainees such as Mohammed were screened by medical experts, who checked their vital signs, took blood samples, and marked a chart with a diagram of a human body, noting scars, wounds, and other imperfections. As the person involved in the Council of Europe inquiry put it, "It's like when you hire a motor vehicle, circling where the scratches are on the rearview mirror. Each detainee was continually assessed, physically and psychologically."

According to sources, Mohammed said that, while in C.I.A. custody, he was placed in his own cell, where he remained naked for several days. He was questioned by an unusual number of female handlers, perhaps as an additional humiliation. He has alleged that he was attached to a dog leash, and yanked in such a way that he was propelled into the walls of his cell. Sources say that he also claimed to have been suspended from the ceiling by his arms, his toes barely touching the ground. The pressure on his wrists evidently became exceedingly painful.

Ramzi Kassem, who teaches at Yale Law School, said that a Yemeni client of his, Sanad al-Kazimi, who is now in Guantánamo, alleged that he had received similar treatment in the Dark Prison, the facility near Kabul. Kazimi claimed to have been suspended by his arms for long periods, causing his legs to swell painfully. "It's so traumatic, he can barely speak of it," Kassem said. "He breaks down in tears." Kazimi also claimed that, while hanging, he was beaten with electric cables.

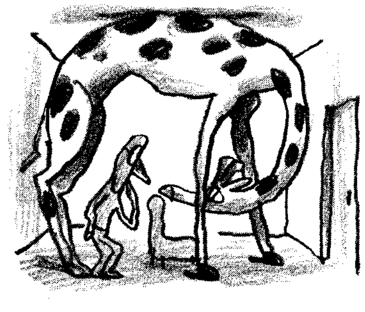
According to sources familiar with interrogation techniques, the hanging position is designed, in part, to prevent detainees from being able to sleep. The former C.I.A. officer, who is knowledgeable about the interrogation program, explained that "sleep deprivation works. Your electrolyte balance changes. You lose all balance and ability to think rationally. Stuff comes out." Sleep deprivation has been recognized as an effective form of coercion since the Middle Ages, when it was called *tormentum insomniae*. It was also recognized for decades in the United States as an illegal form of torture. An American Bar Association report, published in 1930, which was cited in a later U.S. Supreme Court decision, said, "It has been known since 1500 at least that deprivation of sleep is the most effective torture and certain to produce any confession desired."

Under President Bush's new executive order, C.I.A. detainees must receive the "basic necessities of life, including adequate food and water, shelter from the elements, necessary clothing, protection from extremes of heat and cold, and essential medical care." Sleep, according to the order, is not among the basic necessities.

In addition to keeping a prisoner awake, the simple act of remaining upright can over time cause significant pain. McCoy, the historian, noted that "long-time standing" was a common K.G.B. interrogation technique. In his 2006 book, "A Question of Torture," he writes that the Soviets found that making a victim stand for eighteen to twenty-four hours can produce "excruciating pain, as ankles double in size, skin becomes tense and intensely painful, blisters erupt oozing watery serum, heart rates soar, kidneys shut down, and delusions deepen."

Mohammed is said to have described being chained naked to a metal ring in his cell wall for prolonged periods in a painful crouch. (Several other detainees who say that they were confined in the Dark Prison have described identical treatment.) He also claimed that he was kept alternately in suffocating heat and in a painfully cold room, where he was doused with ice water. The practice, which can cause hypothermia, violates the Geneva Conventions, and President Bush's new executive order arguably bans it.

Some detainees held by the C.I.A. claimed that their cells were bombarded with deafening sound twenty-fours hours a day for weeks, and even months. One detainee, Binyam Mohamed, who is now in Guantánamo, told his lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith, that speakers blared music into his cell while he was handcuffed. Detainees recalled the sound as ranging from ghoulish laughter, "like the soundtrack from a horror film," to ear-splitting rap anthems. Stafford Smith said that his client found the psychological torture more intolerable than the physical abuse that he said he had been previously subjected to in Morocco, where, he said, local intelligence agents had sliced him with a razor blade. "The C.I.A. worked people day and night for months," Stafford Smith quoted Binyam Mohamed as saying. "Plenty lost their minds. I could hear people knocking their heads against the walls and doors, screaming their heads off."



Professor Kassem said his Yemeni client, Kazimi, had told him that, during his incarceration in the Dark Prison, he attempted suicide three times, by ramming his head into the walls. "He did it until he lost consciousness," Kassem said. "Then they stitched him back up. So he did it again. The next time, he woke up, he was chained, and they'd given him tranquillizers. He asked to go to the bathroom, and then he did it again." This last time, Kazimi was given more tranquillizers, and chained in a more confining manner.

The case of Khaled el-Masri, another detainee, has received wide attention. He is the German car salesman whom the C.I.A. captured in 2003 and dispatched to Afghanistan, based on erroneous intelligence; he was released in 2004, and Condoleezza Rice reportedly conceded the mistake to the German chancellor. Masri is considered one of the more credible sources on the black-site program, because Germany has confirmed that he has no connections to terrorism. He has also described inmates bashing their heads against the walls. Much of his account appeared on the front page of the *Times*. But, during a visit to America last fall, he became tearful as he recalled the plight of a Tanzanian in a neighboring cell. The man seemed "psychologically at the end," he said. "I could hear him ramming his head against the wall in despair. I tried to calm him down. I asked the doctor, 'Will you take care of this human being?'" But the doctor, whom Masri described as American, refused to help. Masri also said that he was told that guards had "locked the Tanzanian in a suitcase for long periods of time—a foul-smelling suitcase that made him vomit." (Masri did not witness such abuse.)

Masri described his prison in Afghanistan as a filthy hole, with walls scribbled on in Pashtun and Arabic. He was given

BLAKE

I watch William Blake, who spotted angels
every day in treetops
and met God on the staircase
of his little house and found light in grimy alleys—

Blake, who died
singing gleefully
in a London thronged
with streetwalkers, admirals, and miracles,

William Blake, engraver, who labored
and lived in poverty but not despair,
who received burning signs
from the sea and from the starry sky,

who never lost hope, since hope
was always born anew like breath,
I see those who walked like him on graying streets,
headed toward the dawn's rosy orchid.

—*Adam Zagajewski*

(*Translated, from the Polish, by Clare Cavanagh.*)

no bed, only a coarse blanket on the floor. At night, it was too cold to sleep. He said, "The water was putrid. If you took a sip, you could taste it for hours. You could smell a foul smell from it three metres away." The Salt Pit, he said, "was managed and run by the Americans. It was not a secret. They introduced themselves as Americans." He added, "When anything came up, they said they couldn't make a decision. They said, 'We will have to pass it on to Washington.'" The interrogation room at the Salt Pit, he said, was overseen by a half-dozen English-speaking masked men, who shoved him and shouted at him, saying, "You're in a country where there's no rule of law. You might be buried here."

According to two former C.I.A. officers, an interrogator of Mohammed told them that the Pakistani was kept in a cell over which a sign was placed: "The Proud Murderer of 3,000 Americans." (Another source calls this apocryphal.) One of these former officers defends the C.I.A.'s program by noting that "there was absolutely nothing done to K.S.M. that wasn't done to the interrogators themselves"—a reference to SERE-like training. Yet the Red Cross report emphasizes that it was the simultaneous use of several techniques for extended periods that made the treatment "especially abusive." Senator Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who has been a prominent critic of the Administration's embrace of harsh interrogation techniques, said that, particularly with sensory deprivation, "there's a point where it's torture. You can put someone in a refrigerator and it's torture. Everything is a matter of degree."

One day, Mohammed was apparently transferred to a specially designated prison for high-value detainees in Poland. Such transfers were so secretive, according to the report by the Council of Europe, that the C.I.A. filed dummy flight plans, indicating that the planes were heading elsewhere. Once Polish air space was entered, the Polish aviation authority would secretly shepherd the flight, leaving no public documentation. The Council of Europe report notes that the Polish authorities would file a one-way flight plan out of the country, creating a false paper trail. (The Polish government has strongly denied that any black sites were established in the country.)

No more than a dozen high-value detainees were held at the Polish black site, and none have been released from government custody; accordingly, no first-hand accounts of conditions there have emerged. But, according to well-informed sources, it was a far more high-tech facility than the prisons in Afghanistan. The cells had hydraulic doors and air-conditioning. Multiple cameras in each cell provided video surveillance of the detainees. In some ways, the circumstances were better: the detainees were given bottled water. Without confirming the existence of any black sites, Robert Grenier, the former C.I.A. counterterrorism chief, said, "The agency's techniques became less aggressive as they learned the art of interrogation," which, he added, "*is* an art."

Mohammed was kept in a prolonged state of sensory deprivation, during which every point of reference was erased. The Council on Europe's report describes a four-month isolation regime as typical. The prisoners had no exposure to natural light, making it impossible for them to tell if it was night or day. They interacted only with masked, silent guards. (A detainee held at what was most likely an Eastern European black site, Mohammed al-Asad, told me that white noise was piped in constantly, although during electrical outages he could hear people crying.) According to a source familiar with the Red Cross report, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed claimed that he was shackled and kept naked, except for a pair of goggles and earmuffs. (Some prisoners were kept naked for as long as forty days.) He had no idea where he was, although, at one point, he apparently glimpsed Polish writing on a water bottle.

In the C.I.A.'s program, meals were delivered sporadically, to insure that the prisoners remained temporally disoriented. The food was largely tasteless, and barely enough to live on. Mohammed, who upon his capture in Rawalpindi was photographed looking flabby and unkempt, was now described as being slim. Experts on the C.I.A. program say that the administering of food is part of its psychological arsenal. Sometimes portions were smaller than the day before, for no apparent reason. "It was all part of the conditioning," the person involved in the Council of Europe inquiry said. "It's all calibrated to develop dependency."

The inquiry source said that most of the Poland detainees were waterboarded, including Mohammed. According to the sources familiar with the Red Cross report, Mohammed claimed to have been waterboarded five times. Two former C.I.A. officers who are friends with one of Mohammed's interrogators called this bravado, insisting that he was waterboarded only once. According to one of the officers, Mohammed needed only to be shown the drowning equipment again before he "broke."

"Waterboarding works," the former officer said. "Drowning is a baseline fear. So is falling. People dream about it. It's human nature. Suffocation is a very scary thing. When you're waterboarded, you're inverted, so it exacerbates the fear. It's not painful, but it scares the shit out of you." (The former officer was waterboarded himself in a training course.) Mohammed, he claimed, "didn't resist. He sang right away. He cracked real quick." He said, "A lot of them want to talk. Their egos are unimaginable. K.S.M. was just a little doughboy. He couldn't stand toe to toe and fight it out."

The former officer said that the C.I.A. kept a doctor standing by during interrogations. He insisted that the method was safe and effective, but said that it could cause lasting psychic damage to the interrogators. During interrogations, the former agency official said, officers worked in teams, watching each other behind two-way mirrors. Even with this group support, the friend said, Mohammed's interrogator "has horrible nightmares." He went on, "When you cross over that line of darkness, it's hard to come back. You lose your soul. You can do your best to justify it, but it's well outside the norm. You can't go to that dark a place without it changing you." He said of his friend, "He's a good guy. It really haunts him. You are inflicting something really evil and horrible on somebody."

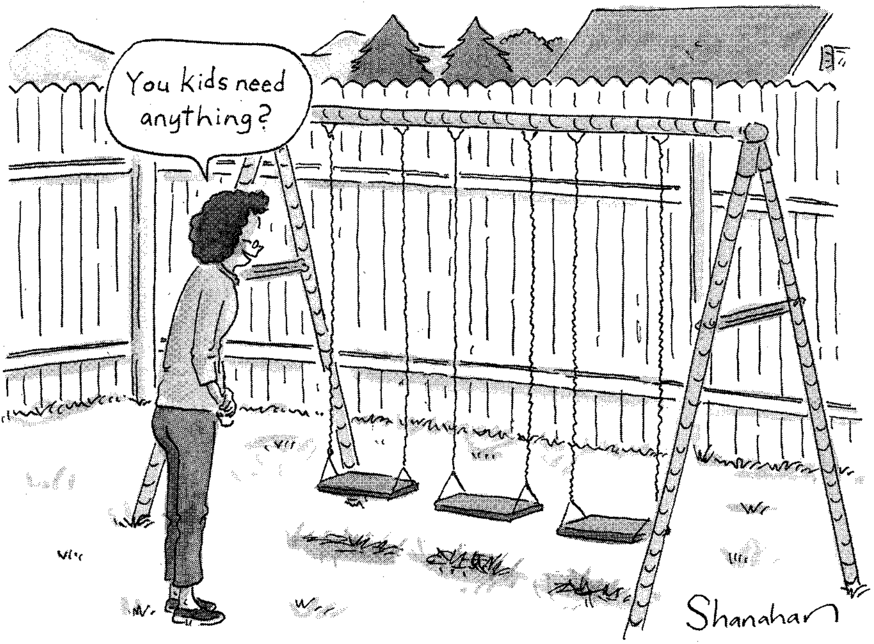
Among the few C.I.A. officials who knew the details of the detention and interrogation program, there was a tense debate about where to draw the line in terms of treatment. John Brennan, Tenet's former chief of staff, said, "It all comes down to individual moral barometers." Waterboarding, in particular, troubled many officials, from both a moral and a legal perspective. Until 2002, when Bush Administration lawyers asserted that waterboarding was a permissible interrogation technique for "enemy combatants," it was classified as a form of torture, and treated as a serious criminal offense. American soldiers were court-martialled for waterboarding captives as recently as the Vietnam War.

A C.I.A. source said that Mohammed was subjected to waterboarding only after interrogators determined that he was hiding information from them. But Mohammed has apparently said that, even after he started coöperating, he was waterboarded. Footnotes to the 9/11 Commission report indicate that by April 17, 2003—a month and a half after he was captured—Mohammed had already started providing substantial information on Al Qaeda. Nonetheless, according to the person involved in the Council of Europe inquiry, he was kept in isolation for years. During this time, Mohammed supplied intelligence on the history of the September 11th plot, and on the structure and operations of Al Qaeda. He also described plots still in a preliminary phase of development, such as a plan to bomb targets on America's West Coast.

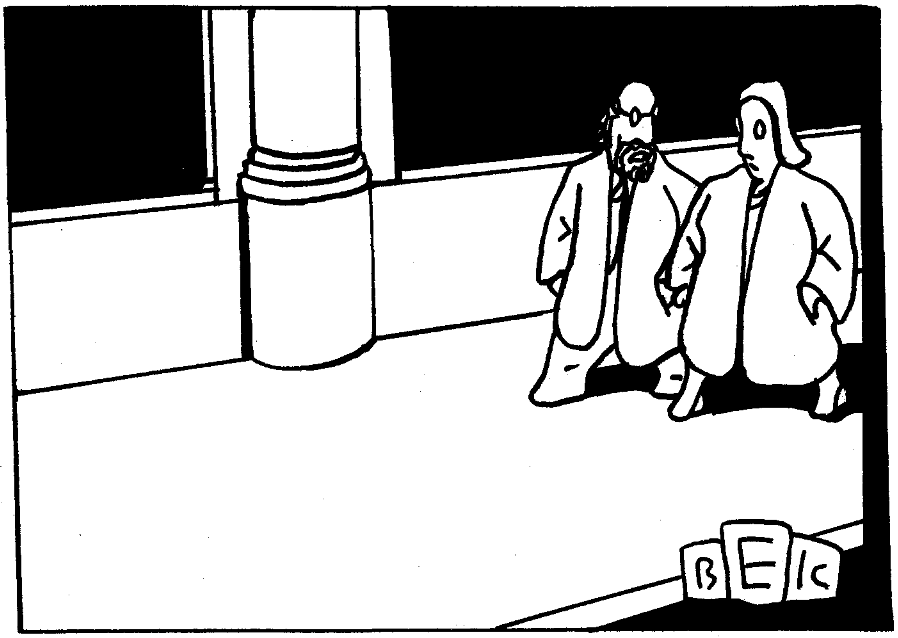
Ultimately, however, Mohammed claimed responsibility for so many crimes that his testimony became to seem inherently dubious. In addition to confessing to the Pearl murder, he said that he had hatched plans to assassinate President Clinton, President Carter, and Pope John Paul II. Bruce Riedel, who was a C.I.A. analyst for twenty-nine years, and who now works at the Brookings Institution, said, "It's difficult to give credence to any particular area of this large a charge sheet that he confessed to, considering the situation he found himself in. K.S.M. has no prospect of ever seeing freedom again, so his only gratification in life is to portray himself as the James Bond of jihadism."

By 2004, there were growing calls within the C.I.A. to transfer to military custody the high-value detainees who had told interrogators what they knew, and to afford them some kind of due process. But Donald Rumsfeld, then the Defense Secretary, who had been heavily criticized for the abusive conditions at military prisons such as Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, refused to take on the agency's detainees, a former top C.I.A. official said. "Rumsfeld's attitude was, *You've* got a real problem." Rumsfeld, the official said, "was the third most powerful person in the U.S. government, but he only looked out for the interests of his department—not the whole Administration." (A spokesperson for Rumsfeld said that he had no comment.)

C.I.A. officials were stymied until the Supreme Court's Hamdan ruling, which prompted the Administration to send what it said were its last high-value detainees to Cuba. Robert Grenier, like many people in the C.I.A., was relieved.



IMAGINARY PLAYDATE



"I've always had this vague curiosity about me."

• •

"There has to be some sense of due process," he said. "We can't just make people disappear." Still, he added, "The most important source of intelligence we had after 9/11 came from the interrogations of high-value detainees." And he said that Mohammed was "the most valuable of the high-value detainees, because he had operational knowledge." He went on, "I can respect people who oppose aggressive interrogations, but they should admit that their principles may be putting American lives at risk."

Yet Philip Zelikow, the executive director of the 9/11 Commission and later the State Department's top counsellor, under Rice, is not convinced that eliciting information from detainees justifies "physical torment." After leaving the government last year, he gave a speech in Houston, in which he said, "The question would not be, Did you get information that proved useful? Instead it would be, Did you get information that could have been usefully gained only from these methods?" He concluded, "My own view is that the cool, carefully considered, methodical, prolonged, and repeated subjection of captives to physical torment, and the accompanying psychological terror, is immoral."

Without more transparency, the value of the C.I.A.'s interrogation and detention program is impossible to evaluate. Setting aside the moral, ethical, and legal issues, even supporters, such as John Brennan, acknowledge that much of the information that coercion produces is unreliable. As he put it, "All these methods produced useful information, but there was also a lot that was bogus." When pressed, one former top agency official estimated that "ninety per cent of the information was unreliable." Cables carrying Mohammed's interrogation transcripts back to Washington reportedly were prefaced with the warning that "the detainee has been known to withhold information or deliberately mislead." Mohammed, like virtually all the top Al Qaeda prisoners held by the C.I.A., has claimed that, while under coercion, he lied to please his captors.

In theory, a military commission could sort out which parts of Mohammed's confession are true and which are lies, and obtain a conviction. Colonel Morris D. Davis, the chief prosecutor at the Office of Military Commissions, said that he expects to bring charges against Mohammed "in a number of months." He added, "I'd be shocked if the defense didn't try to make K.S.M.'s treatment a problem for me, but I don't think it will be insurmountable."

Critics of the Administration fear that the unorthodox nature of the C.I.A.'s interrogation and detention program will make it impossible to prosecute the entire top echelon of Al Qaeda leaders in captivity. Already, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, credible allegations of torture have caused a Marine Corps prosecutor reluctantly to decline to bring charges against Mohamedou Ould Slahi, an alleged Al Qaeda leader held in Guantánamo. Bruce Riedel, the former C.I.A. analyst, asked, "What are you going to do with K.S.M. in the long run? It's a very good question. I don't think anyone has an answer. If you took him to any real American court, I think any judge would say there is no admissible evidence. It would be thrown out."

The problems with Mohammed's coerced confessions are especially glaring in the Daniel Pearl case. It may be that Mohammed killed Pearl, but contradictory evidence and opinion continue to surface. Yosri Fouda, the Al Jazeera reporter who interviewed Mohammed in Karachi, said that although Mohammed handed him a package of propaganda items, including an unedited video of the Pearl murder, he never identified himself as playing a role in the killing, which occurred in the same city just two months earlier. And a federal official involved in Mohammed's case said, "He has no history of killing with his own hands, although he's proved happy to commit mass murder from afar." Al Qaeda's leadership had increasingly focussed on symbolic political targets. "For him, it's not personal," the official said. "It's business."

Ordinarily, the U.S. legal system is known for resolving such mysteries with painstaking care. But the C.I.A.'s secret interrogation program, Senator Levin said, has undermined the public's trust in American justice, both here and abroad. "A guy as dangerous as K.S.M. is, and half the world wonders if they can believe him—is that what we want?" he asked. "Statements that can't be believed, because people think they rely on torture?"

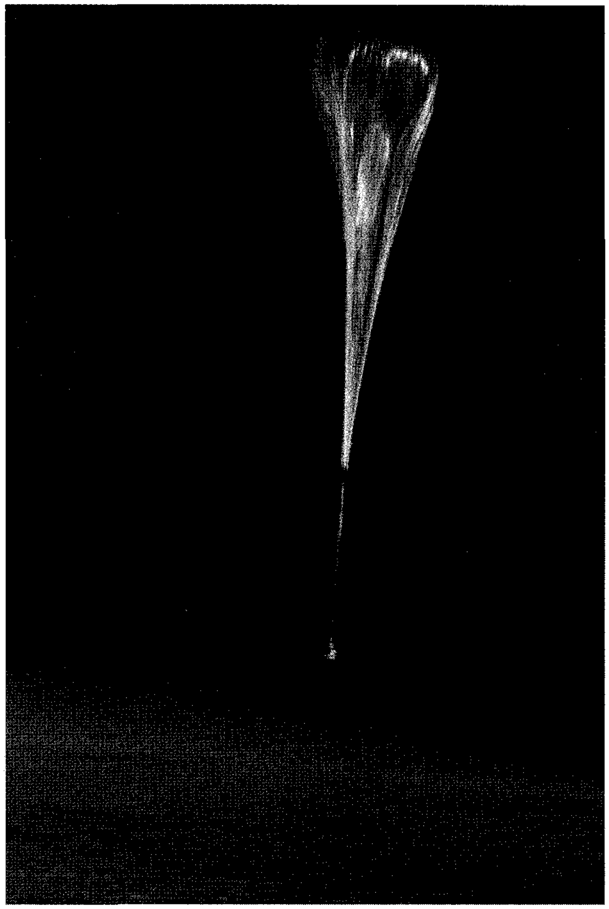
Asra Nomani, the Pearls' friend, said of the Mohammed confession, "I'm not interested in unfair justice, even for bad people." She went on, "Danny was such a person of conscience. I don't think he would have wanted all of this dirty business. I don't think he would have wanted someone being tortured. He would have been repulsed. This is the kind of story that Danny would have investigated. He really believed in American principles." ♦

OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

FALLING

Can you parachute twenty-five miles and survive?

BY BURKHARD BILGER



In August, 1960, Joe Kittinger jumped from a balloon nearly nineteen miles above New Mexico.

Somewhere around sixty-three thousand feet above the earth, our body fluids begin to boil. They do this not because the temperature is so high but because the atmosphere is so thin. Water, kept liquid by air pressure on earth, turns to gas as the pressure drops, bubbling noticeably on the tip of the tongue. Physiologists call this altitude Armstrong's Line, after the Army Air Corps doctor who defined it, in the nineteen-thirties, and it may be the greatest barrier to our survival in space. But there are plenty of others.

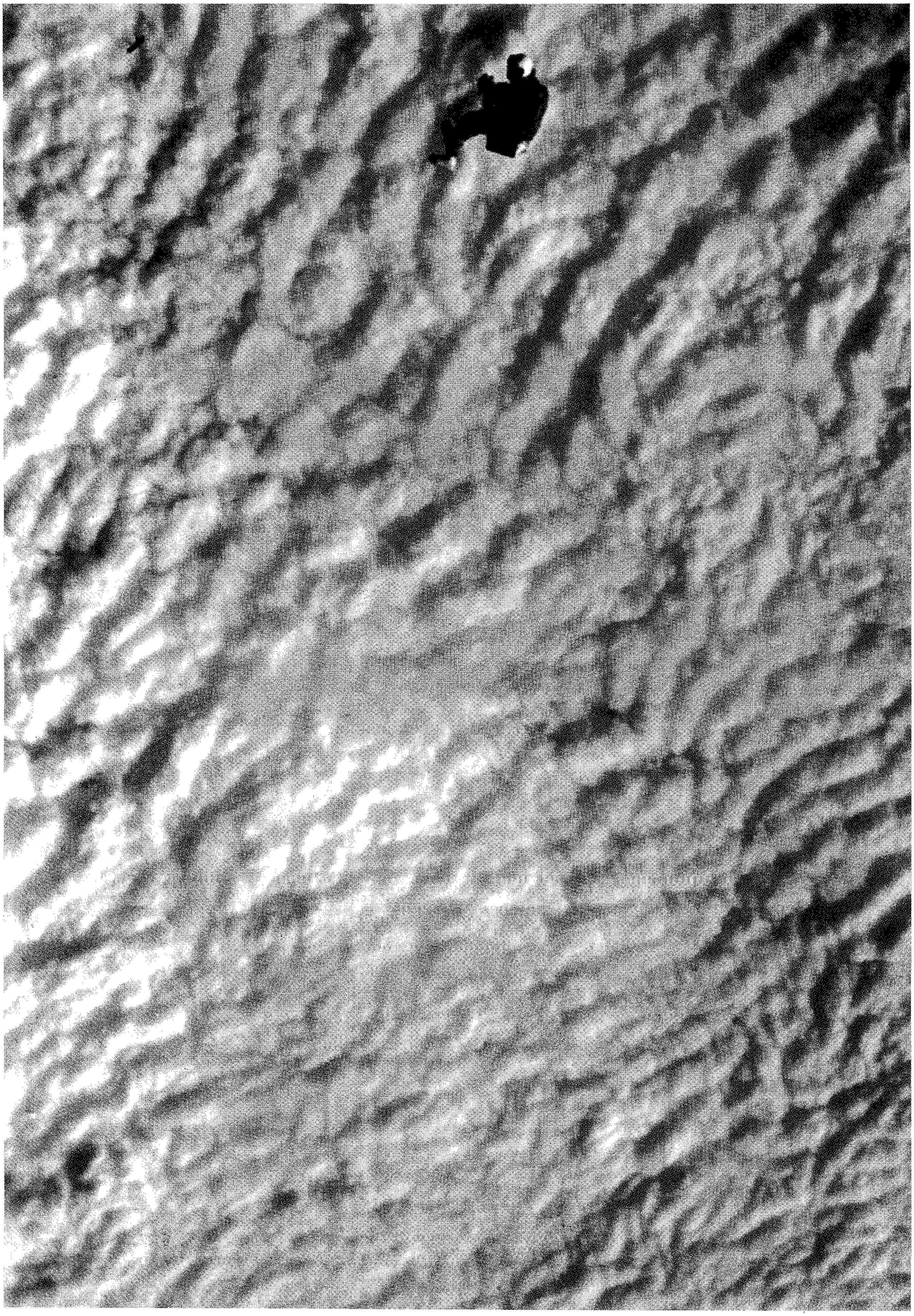
Above ten thousand feet, pilots without air tanks begin to suffer hypoxia: their brains get so little oxygen that they start to speak gibberish and make foolish errors. At forty thousand feet, temperatures can drop below negative sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit. At fifty thousand feet, any gases trapped in the body expand to more than eight times their volume at sea level, swelling intestines, rupturing lung tissue, and distending the abdomen until it hinders breathing. In 1959, when a Marine lieutenant colonel named William Rankin bailed out of his fighter jet at fifty thousand feet, he barely survived the fall, bleeding from every orifice. Had he stayed at that altitude without an oxygen mask, he would have blacked out within ten seconds and suffered brain damage within minutes.

Michel Fournier has fallen from thirty-nine thousand feet—he holds the French record for high-altitude skydiving—but he longs to go much higher. His record jump was just a warmup, he says, for what he calls *le Grand Saut*, the Great Leap: the highest, longest, and fastest jump ever attempted. Later this summer, weather and equipment permitting, Fournier will don a pressure suit, climb into a space capsule attached to a vast helium balloon, and rise twenty-five miles above the plains of Saskatchewan—more than twice the height of Armstrong's Line. Then he'll jump out.

"The dream is to come back from space on foot," Fournier told me one afternoon this spring. We were standing on a ridge overlooking his house in the village of Bendejun, in the hill country north of Nice. In the middle distance, the medieval fortified town of Coaraze stood watch over olive groves, goat trails, and gnarled forests of laurel and pine. Above us, the sky was pale blue and cloudless, and seemed to hold no menace. "Isn't it marvellous?" Fournier said, throwing his arms wide. "What Olympian calm! *C'est le paradis terrestre!*" He turned to me and grinned. "I could have landed in a worse spot," he said.

Fournier is a retired colonel in the French Army. He has made more than eight thousand jumps in his career, but he looks less like a paratrooper, these days, than like *un petit fonctionnaire:* big ears and bulbous nose, square jaw and silvery hair. As he talks, he hunches his shoulders, flutters his hands, blows out his cheeks, and bobs his head—the full arsenal of Gallic mannerisms. One moment, he'll cry out in high delight—"*Hoo-hoo!*"—eyebrows peaked like *accents circonflexes*. Then, suddenly, his lips clamp shut and his eyes glint, like a toad that has swallowed a dragonfly. "This is a world of brutes, of war," he told me. "Look at what is happening in Darfur, in Iraq. *Oh là là*. But I love life. I like good things—*les belles femmes, la bonne bouffe*." Skydiving, he said, should bring "nothing but pleasure and happiness." Even if it may kill you.

The gravel path we were on served as Fournier's exercise track. Every morning before dawn, he hiked there from the village below, along a switchback trail through the thorny garigue. Lavender, rosemary, and purple anemone lined the way, releasing their scent as the sun grew hot. In the spring, the mountainside was carpeted in yellow mimosa blossoms—"a magnificent odor," Fournier said, "but not so good for people with allergies." The full circuit ran five or six miles, with stops



US AIR FORCE/NG; US AIR FORCE/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

"Make eye contact with the jury, but not homicidal-maniac eye contact."

• •

shoulders and darted his eyes from side to side—"and tried to survive." His regiment was the last to return home.

Fournier knew by then that he had no hope of flying planes in the Army. What he could do was jump from them. He made his first skydive in Blida, Algeria, from thirteen hundred feet—one hundredth the height he hopes to jump this summer—and worked his way up. Over the next thirty years, he made drops throughout Europe and Africa, in countries he'd rather not name, providing "military assistance," he said, but never waging war. "It was a life lived out of suitcases." When Fournier wasn't in the field, he participated in marathons, pentathlons, and marksmanship competitions; he taught skydiving courses and went back to school. By the age of forty, he had a baccalaureate, an engineering degree, and a pilot's license. Still, the upper atmosphere seemed beyond him: his license was strictly for civilian planes.

Then came the Great Leap. When the Defense Ministry launched the program, in 1987, the French space agency was developing the first European space shuttle, Hermes. The shuttle was originally designed to carry up to six passengers, but after the Challenger disaster in 1986 the number was trimmed to three, to leave room for parachutes and ejection seats. (NASA had decided against such seats, for reasons of "limited utility, technical infeasibility," and "program cost," according to a report released after the incident; the current shuttles still don't have them.) The Great Leap seemed an ideal opportunity to test the new systems. No airplane could fly high enough, but a helium balloon could, and the French had a long history with such aircraft. The first manned hot-air balloon, the first hydrogen balloon, and the first functional dirigibles had all been launched in France. "The French may not have oil," Fournier likes to say, "but we do have ideas."

The Air Force nominated sixty-eight candidates for the program. Most were experienced pilots and paratroopers, veterans of the military's Darwinian ways. The first cuts were made on medical grounds: blood tests, eye tests, stress and endurance tests. The next were intellectual: the candidates had to pass exams in math, physics, electronics, and atmospheric science. The last were psycho-

along the way for yoga, calisthenics, and pistol marksmanship in a nearby quarry. "It concentrates the mind," he said.

Fournier had turned sixty-three that May. His eyes were still good, after a round of laser surgery in 2002, but his eight thousand leaps from unpressurized planes had taken a toll on his hearing. Shirtless, his torso had the burled, knobby look of an old chestnut tree, the skin just starting to loosen over the bunched muscles beneath. I asked him if he wasn't too old to be an astronaut. "Why?" he said, frowning, as if the idea had never occurred to him. "John Glenn was seventy-seven when he went into space." He clenched his fist and shook it in the air. "*La bête est solide!*" he said. The beast is robust!

The Great Leap is a throwback to a more heroic era of the Space Age—before budget cuts, robotic probes, and decaying shuttles. The project was conceived in the late nineteen-eighties by the French Ministry of Defense and later co-sponsored by the French space agency. Its primary goal was to test parachutes and other skydiving equipment for high-altitude pilots and astronauts. It would also answer a fundamental question about human physiology: How far and how fast can a person fall and still survive?

Fournier seems an unlikely candidate for such a program. In France, astronauts are an intellectual as well as a physical élite: they have to earn a baccalaureate degree and take four years of advanced course work, usually in science or engineering. Fournier dropped out of school when he was thirteen. His parents were tenant farmers in the hills of Auvergne—"simple people of the earth, but with large hearts," as he put it—who raised cows, pigs, rabbits, and poultry, and a few acres of root crops and grain. They gave Fournier and his little brother, Gerard, a "tremendous taste for life," he said, but there was no future in it: "I didn't want to vegetate as a peasant." After he left school, he took a job at a neighboring farm, bringing in the harvest. At eighteen, he joined the Army.

Fournier had hoped to become a pilot and to continue his education in the military. But his first posting, in 1963, left little time for study. He was sent to Algeria, a year after the country won its independence from France. "It was a catastrophe," he said. "They wanted nothing but to get rid of us. If you weren't in agreement, they would shoot you, like in Iraq today. We had wounded, we had dead. We had bullets, but no right to shoot. So we sat in our barracks"—he drew in his logical. "They did everything they could to destabilize us," Fournier said. "They made us perform procedures while playing video games—you had to be hyperconcentrated—or they showed us films of astronauts in decompression accidents. You saw the body inflate and inflate and inflate, and then it died." After six months, twenty-five candidates were left. At the end of a year, there were ten, of whom three were considered the top candidates. Two were astronauts in the French space program. The third was Fournier.

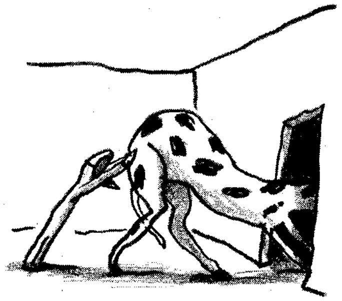
"Were you surprised?" I asked him. "*Ah, non*," he said. "I had the will to win, and a morale of steel!" But his victory was short-lived. The Cold War was ending, the Berlin Wall was on the verge of coming down, and an independent European space program was beginning to seem both exorbitant and unnecessary. In 1988, the French Ministry of Defense put the skydiving project on hold; the Hermes program was cancelled a few years later. "I talked to counsellors to two Presidents," Fournier said. "One was Mitterrand, the other was Chirac. But there was no European shuttle, so the project was abandoned. 'Go work for NASA,' someone told me."

Fournier had other ideas. In 1992, he quit the Army and sold the villa and the swimming pool that he'd built for his retirement, in the South of France. He used the proceeds to buy the Defense Ministry's mothballed equipment—a pressurized gondola had already been built and flown with a test dummy. Then he went looking for sponsors to design and donate the rest of his gear. Over the past fifteen years, he has raised more than eleven million dollars ("Not one centime of public money!") and has twice gone to Canada ready to jump, only to suffer last-minute malfunctions. This summer may be his last chance. "I cannot live like this indefinitely," he told me. "I will lose my credibility. I will lose the confidence of my partners. I will lose everything."

Fournier likes to think of the myth of Icarus as an inspirational tale rather than a cautionary one. "He's one of my heroes," he said—a not uncommon view among skydivers. No other group so ardently courts disaster. And none has so spectacular a history of failures.

In the year 1010, Eilmer of Malmesbury, the Flying Monk, strapped wings to his hands and feet and leaped from the monastery's eighty-foot tower, breaking both legs. In 1742, the Marquis de Bacqueville jumped from his stately home on the Seine, wearing petal-like wings on his arms and legs, and crashed into a washerwoman's barge. In 1912, an Austrian tailor named Franz Reichelt dived from the Eiffel Tower with what looked like a large tent jutting from his back. He died on impact. Others smacked into roofs and bridges, got tangled in their parachutes or pulled them too late. They wore webbed bat suits that sent them into deadly spins, or spiny wings that got caught on their chutes. One batman from the nineteen-forties, cited in Michael Abrams's gruesomely diverting history, "Birdmen, Batmen, and Skyflyers," published in 2006, guessed that seventy-one of his seventy-five predecessors had died on the job. He was probably exaggerating. Nevertheless, most of them would have been better off doing what a French dog did in 1785, when it was dropped from a hot-air balloon wearing a parachute: it landed unharmed and ran away as fast as it could.

Only a year earlier, Benjamin Franklin had foreseen the military uses of flight. "Ten thousand men descending from the clouds," he wrote, might do "an infinite deal of mischief." But it wasn't until 1911, according to some sources, that a man named Grant Morton made the first successful jump from an airplane. Morton held his parachute in his arms and tossed it out as he fell over Venice Beach, California. Later, chutes were tucked into backpacks and pulled free by a tether—hemispheric canopies so large that they could dislocate shoulders as they yanked open. By the end of the First World War, German pilots had parachutes, but most Americans didn't. The chutes might catch on propellers, it was thought, and the Air Force didn't want its men losing nerve in a dogfight.



The human body isn't meant for falling, physiologists argued, sensibly enough. Unless a skydiver pulled his chute immediately, they reasoned, he would lose consciousness within seconds. This turned out to be wrong. Less than twenty years after Morton's jump, skydivers were happily free-falling thousands of feet without fainting. Still, bailing out of a burning jet was another matter. By the late forties, experimental planes were breaking the speed of sound and flying at altitudes of more than seventy thousand feet. At what point was parachuting an act of suicide?

Some answers soon emerged in a series of experiments by John Paul Stapp, an Air Force physician and biophysicist. Stapp was the son of Southern Baptist missionaries. He'd been brought up in Brazil, speaking only Portuguese and Indian dialects. At the age of twelve, he came to the United States to complete his schooling. As a student at Baylor, where he earned master's degrees in zoology and chemistry, Stapp was so poor that he subsisted on guinea pigs and other lab animals. The jungle had taught him "the value of human survival against our plant and animal antagonists," he later wrote, and he approached the upper atmosphere with the same Manichaean zeal.

Stapp wanted to know the true limits of physical tolerance. He used cats, chimpanzees, and human subjects for his research, but reserved the most dangerous tests for himself. Beginning in 1946, he made repeated flights to forty-seven thousand feet in an unpressurized plane, racking his body with the bends. (By breathing pure oxygen before a flight, he discovered, he could rid his blood of the nitrogen that would bubble up as the pressure dropped.) Later, he had a rocket sled built on a track in southern New Mexico and fired himself across the desert at up to six hundred miles per hour. By December of 1954, Craig Ryan writes in his 1995 book "The Pre-Astronauts," Stapp had broken his ribs and wrists, suffered concussions, hernias, retinal hemorrhages, and "searing headaches that lingered for days." His final sled run subjected his body to forty-six times the force of gravity and left him temporarily blind. But he survived.

Stapp's tests showed that pilots could

bail out at close to supersonic speeds. By then, though, the first near-space missions were being developed, raising a new set of concerns. How would humans react to zero gravity? Would cosmic rays "perforate the body with such wounds as sterilized needles would leave," as an article in *Popular Science* put it at the time?

The Air Force had launched V-2 rockets with monkeys (and dachshunds, according to Ryan) stuffed into nose cones. But the animals rarely came down intact. To get better data, Stapp recruited a test pilot named Joe Kittinger—a cocky redhead from Orlando, Florida, who'd been a champion speedboat racer before joining the Air Force. Kittinger flew what were known as Keplerian trajectories. He would dive down from fifteen thousand feet, then pull up into a hard, arcing climb. As the plane crested, at about twenty thousand feet, Kittinger and his test subjects—humans, cats, or monkeys—would be weightless for thirty to forty seconds. "They were trying to see if cats would lose their ability to right themselves," he told me recently. "But, as I remember it, they would just start floating around the plane. We'd hit zero gravity, and there would be this cat going by."

Kittinger came to enjoy the feeling of zero gravity, and cosmic rays proved much less dangerous than was feared. Their most noticeable effect, Ryan reports, was to give black mice a few white hairs. The real dangers of space, as it turned out, were those which pilots had known all along: the air pressure and the cold. But only experience would show if a parachutist, properly equipped, could withstand them. In the fall of 1959, Stapp sent Kittinger back to the upper atmosphere, this time to jump from a balloon.

Kittinger is seventy-nine now, with wispy white-blond hair, watery eyes, and pale cheeks pricked with burst capillaries, but he has lost little of his old daring. He has spent most of his retirement in Orlando, barnstorming and balloon racing, and he goes alligator hunting every fall. Early one morning in May, about a week before I visited Fournier, Kittinger drove me to a field outside town to demonstrate the glories and uncertainties of hot-air ballooning. His wife, Sherry—thirty-two years younger, with auburn hair flipped up at the shoulders and a prim smile—joined us for the ride, as did the head of their church, Terry Grove. "I figured, if you have to have a co-pilot with you, you might as well have a pastor," Kittinger told me.

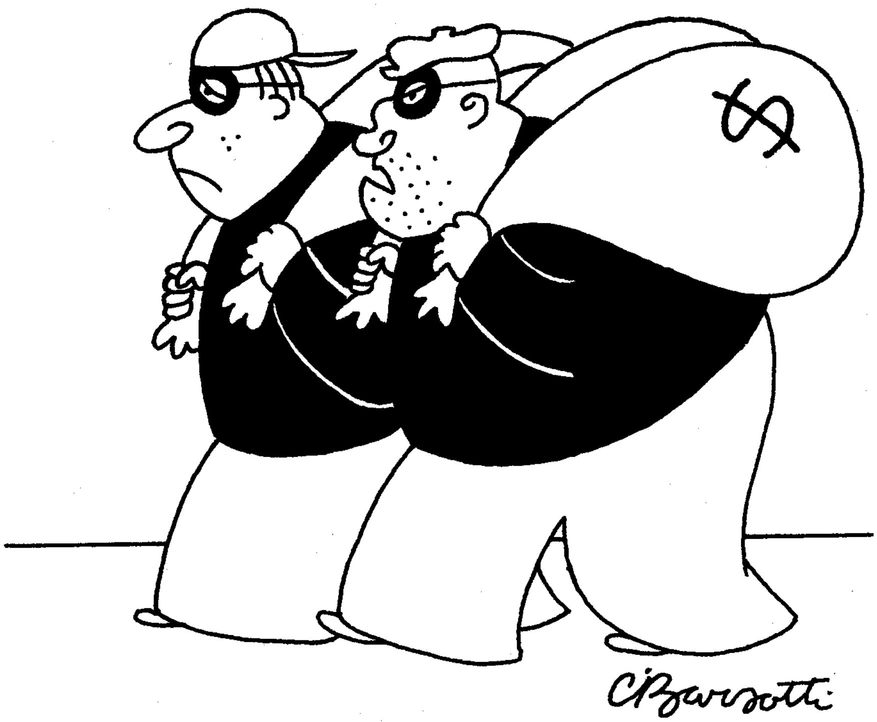
By the time we arrived, two balloons had lifted off and four more were half inflated. They looked like circus tents lying there, candy-colored stripes glowing against the green of the grass. Grant Aiello, a retired fireman who often went flying with Kittinger, pulled his deflated balloon from a trailer and set a large fan to blow into it. After a while, he attached a wicker gondola to the opening and suspended a pair of propane burners above it. Kittinger grabbed the burners' handles and braced his right leg behind him. When he squeezed the ignition, twin flames shot fifteen feet into the belly of the balloon. "It scares the hell out of horses when you fly over them," he shouted. "And all the dogs in the neighborhood will start barking. It's kind of a win-win situation."

The balloon heaved upward. Aiello stepped into the gondola and helped the rest of us over the side. Then Kittinger ignited the burners again and let out a hoarse yodel: we were aloft. The gondola drifted across a pasture for a few hundred feet, quiet as a cloud, then rose over golf courses and orange groves, stock ponds and subdivisions, until the earth receded to patchwork below.

Balloons fly at the mercy of the wind. They have no rudder with which to change course; no propellant to carry them past danger. They're often launched at dawn, when an atmospheric inversion brings calm air to the surface, and their flights must be carefully plotted with weather balloons. In Orlando, only a few fields are available for landings, and balloons are forbidden to fly over Disney World, for fear of terrorism.

The balloons that Kittinger rode to the stratosphere nearly fifty years ago were filled with helium rather than with hot air, but the same principles applied: they were no more predictable than the weather. The Air Force launched them from the desert outside Alamogordo, New Mexico, in part because no one knew where they would land. (As Fournier put it, when I asked him why he chose the empty plains of Saskatchewan for his flight, "My balloon weighs 1.4 tons, the gondola weighs six hundred kilos, and they will fall to earth from forty kilometres of height. If you calculate the impact, it's considerable.") Kittinger, for his part, would rather have jumped from a jet. "You just pull a handle and out you go," he told me. "You're already at terminal velocity."

Kittinger made three high-altitude jumps in all. The first nearly killed him;



"You kids today—the loot is too heavy, the mask is too hot . . ."

the last remains the longest leap ever recorded. Like Fournier, Stapp was running a shoestring operation. He couldn't afford a pressurized cabin, so Kittinger had to sit in an open gondola the size of a pup tent. He wore a pressure suit with its own oxygen supply, an airtight helmet, and three parachutes strapped to his chest and back.

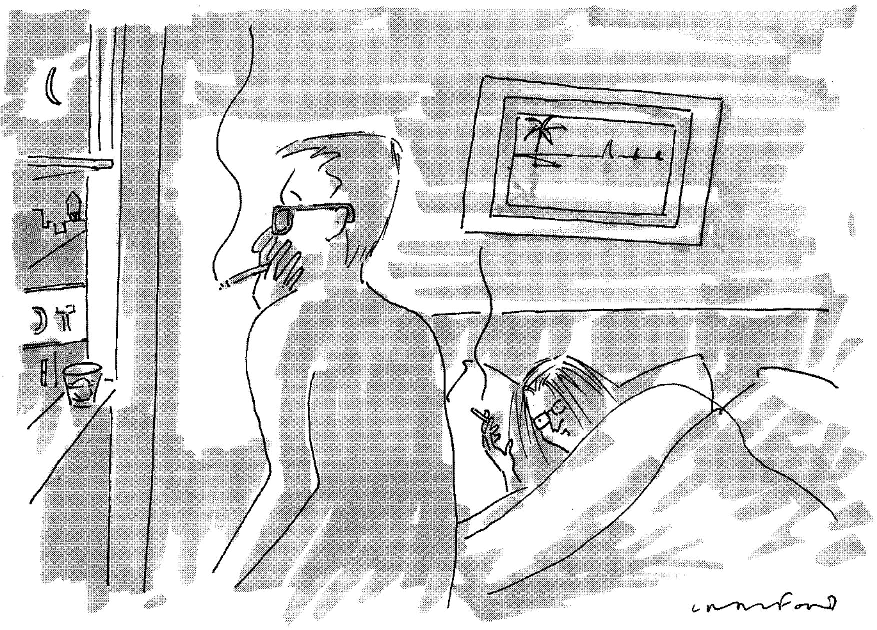
For his first jump, on November 16, 1959, Kittinger rode the balloon to seventy-six thousand feet, nearly twice as high as anyone had fallen before. He unhooked himself from the gondola and prepared to jump, only to find that he couldn't move. The equipment kit that hung from the bottom of his suit had become wedged into the seat as the pressure dropped.

By the time Kittinger wrenched himself free, he was drastically delayed. His first parachute, timed to open automatically, was released almost fourteen seconds early, when he was falling too slowly for it to fill with air. Rather than stabilize his fall, it wrapped around his neck. The second chute opened at eighteen thousand feet and coiled around his body—he was unconscious by then, and spinning up to eighty revolutions per minute. The third, reserve chute saved his life. When he came to, he was drifting down to the desert sand, shrouded in cloth.

Less than a year later, after a second, more successful jump, from seventy-four thousand feet, Kittinger tried again. This time, when he stood up in the gondola he was a hundred and three thousand feet above sea level. The landing site, in New Mexico, was roiled in clouds nineteen miles below. To the west, a thunderstorm was brewing over Flagstaff. To the south, the horizon was a luminous curve that deepened to "an indescribable blue." A thin band of cirrus was floating above it. "Looking out over a very beautiful, beautiful world," Kittinger said into his headset. "Beautiful but hostile. . . . Absolutely black. Void of anything." At that altitude, he'd once quipped, a pilot without a pressure suit was a "dead son of a bitch." He cut the lines connecting him to the gondola and stepped to the edge of the doorway, gripping the frame. "Lord, take care of me now," he said, and tumbled forward.

As Kittinger fell, his first thought was that all motion had ceased: he was suspended in a void. "No wind hisses in my ears or billows my clothing," he wrote in his 1961 autobiography, "The Long Lonely Leap," co-authored with Martin Caidin. "There is no sound, no movement." When he flipped onto his back to see the balloon above him, it seemed to be hurtling into space. In fact, he was doing the hurtling: within thirty seconds, he had fallen thirteen thousand feet and reached a terminal velocity of more than six hundred miles per hour—close to the speed of sound. Yet the atmosphere was thickening so gradually around him that it seemed to offer no resistance. It was like falling into a feather bed nineteen miles deep.

The parachutes, this time, worked perfectly. The first one opened after sixteen seconds, stabilizing Kittinger's fall so well that he practiced a few turns for the fun of it. Near forty thousand feet, his thermometer read ninety-eight degrees below zero, but his pressure suit, which was electrically heated, kept all but his legs warm. When Kittinger landed in the desert, thirteen minutes and forty-five seconds after leaving the gondola, only his right hand bore any evidence of his journey from space. On that side, the glove had failed to pressurize, and the hand had inflated to almost twice its normal size. The swelling went down eventually, but the memory of a hostile sky stayed with him. "Man will never conquer space," Kittinger had told his crew over the radio before he leaped. "He will learn to live with it, but he will never conquer it."



"It may just be celebratory gunfire, babe."

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Kittinger and Fournier have never met, though they exchange e-mail now and then. "He speaks no French and I speak English like a Spanish cow," Fournier says. "But we have a perfect rapport." The two can seem like variations on the same military model: short, sharp, durable men with compensatory ambitions. Both are unswerving patriots, despite having served in inglorious wars. Both were married young and unhappily while stationed abroad (Kittinger to a German, Fournier to a Belgian). Both remarried in their sixties, to much younger women. They missed the greatest adventure of their age—rockets to the moon!—and hung their hopes on balloons.

Kittinger's legacy is secure. His leap was one of the signal feats of the Space Age, and it has never been equalled. ("Would I have jumped out of that balloon?" the astronaut Alan Shepard later said. "That's easy. Hell no.") In 1965 and 1966, an amateur skydiver from New Jersey, Nicholas Piantanida, tried three times to break Kittinger's record. (His story is told in detail in Craig Ryan's 2003 book "Magnificent Failure.") The first time, a wind shear tore the top off his balloon. The second time, the release valve on his oxygen hose jammed, shackling him to the gondola. The third time, his visor came open at fifty-seven thousand feet—no one knows why. He fell into a coma, suffered brain damage and internal bleeding, and died four months later.

"I get a call about once a month from someone saying he's going to break my record," Kittinger told me. "They don't know how to do it. They don't know what's involved. They just want to beat it—and someday someone will. But I might point out that they haven't done it yet." After his jump, Kittinger flew nearly five hundred combat missions in Vietnam, earning two Silver Stars and five Distinguished Flying Crosses. In 1972, he was shot down by a MIG fighter and spent the next eleven months as a prisoner of war in the Hanoi Hilton. Twelve years later, he completed the first solo balloon flight across the Atlantic. (He landed in a forest near Genoa, breaking an ankle in the crash, and had to be carried out by seven Italian woodcutters.) The dates and anecdotes, so often repeated to reporters and veterans' groups, have long since calcified into a fixed narrative, chapters in a hero's quest: the boyhood hunts that forged his self-sufficiency; the speedboat accident that taught him humility; the leap that tested his faith.

For Fournier, hindsight has less to offer. Depending on what happens this summer, the past fifteen years may come to seem heroic or ridiculous. The more obsessively he prepares—submerging his hands in ice water to inure them to extreme cold; staring at a wall for hours at a time, to teach his mind to stay focussed during the balloon's long ascent—the more vulnerable he seems. Is he an astronaut in training, or just an old man pretending to be one? (When I asked Kittinger if he would go to Canada this summer to see Fournier's leap, he frowned. "*If* it takes place," he said. "That poor guy has been trying to break my record for years.") And yet those same uncertainties and shifting contexts enliven everything Fournier says and does. Failure keeps him young.

A VILLAGE LIFE

The death and uncertainty that await me
as they await all men, the shadows evaluating me
because it can take time to destroy a human being,
the element of suspense
needs to be preserved—

On Sundays I walk my neighbor's dog
so she can go to church to pray for her sick mother.

The dog waits for me in the doorway. Summer and winter
we walk the same road, early morning, at the base of the escarpment.
Sometimes the dog gets away from me—for a moment or two,
I can't see him behind some trees. He's very proud of this,
this trick he brings out occasionally, and gives up again
as a favor to me—

Afterward, I go back to my house to gather firewood.

I keep in my mind images from each walk:
monarda growing by the roadside;
in early spring, the dog chasing the little gray mice

so for a while it seems possible
not to think of the hold of the body weakening, the ratio
of the body to the void shifting,

and the prayers becoming prayers for the dead.

Midday, the church bells finished. Light in excess:
still, fog blankets the meadow, so you can't see
the mountain in the distance, covered with snow and ice.

When it appears again, my neighbor thinks
her prayers are answered. So much light she can't control her happiness—
it has to burst out in language. *Hello,* she yells, as though
that is her best translation.

She believes in the Virgin the way I believe in the mountain,
though in one case the fog never lifts.
But each person stores his hope in a different place.

When I visited Fournier, he was about fifty thousand dollars short of his budget. "It's nothing," he said. "One way or the other, I leap!" He spent his time shuttling between training sessions and potential donors—"the Deciders" he called them—barely scraping by on his officer's pension. A successful jump, he hoped, would end his financial worries, bringing speaking fees, endorsement deals, and consulting work. "I don't mean to be presumptuous," he told me, lowering his voice. "But, once I do this jump, I think that I will be co-opted by NASA. There should be lots of projects for me."

To raise money in the meantime, Fournier had sold his furniture, his stamp collection, and his set of vintage weapons, including a pair of Colt revolvers from the Civil War. Only a few of his things were left in storage at his brother's house. The previous winter, in Nîmes, his heat and electricity had been shut off when he couldn't pay the bills. To keep from freezing, Fournier and his wife, Kim—a sweet-faced forty-eight-year-old with grayish-blond hair and wide, worried eyes—stretched an extension cord to their neighbor's house and ran space heaters. Finally, in the spring,

"You're fifty-seven years old. I'd like to get that down a bit."

OWN THE ORIGINAL

"You're fifty-seven years old. I'd like to get that down a bit."
by Leo Cullum
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—Louise Glück

n the toilet was held to-
packing tape. The sole
ace was the view: out over
d red tile rooftops, over
d hazelnut trees, to the
the Peillon River below.
enclosed, in some apart-
ity," Fournier said. "*Pas*
arachute from the forti-

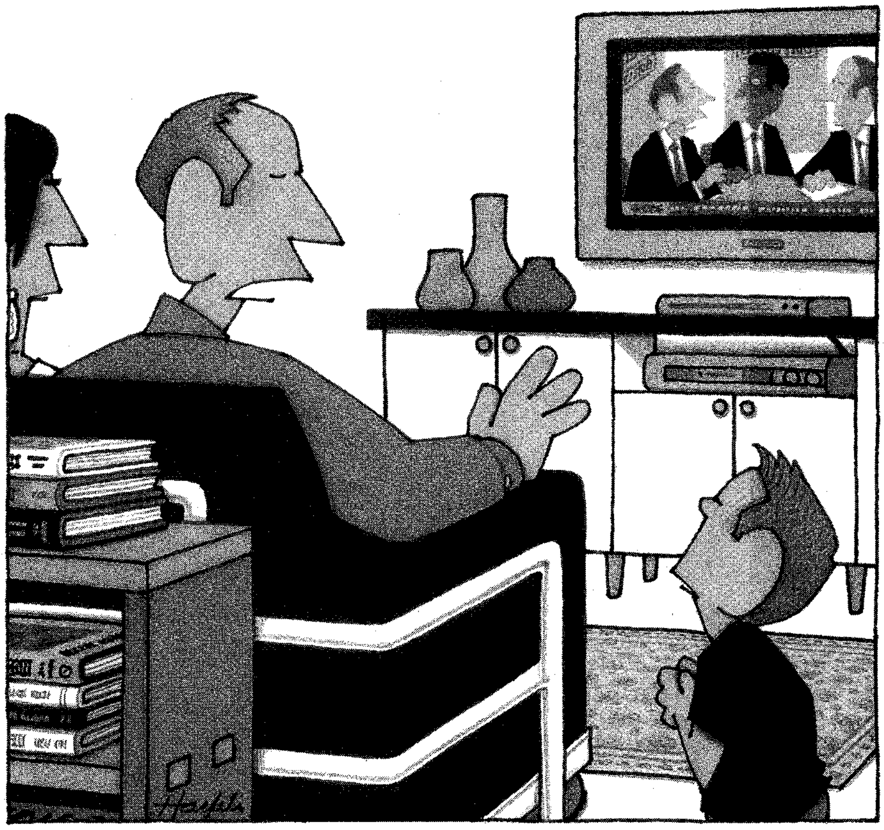
iers met in Saskatche-
—she was a desk clerk
here his team was stay-

ing—and were married a year later. Her French was even worse than his English, but they got by on gestures and a pair of handheld translation computers. Fournier liked to call Kim his little flea, or his *petite Canadienne*, and had a habit of repeating whatever she said even if the grammar was garbled, just to be encouraging. She tried to imagine that she was on a very long camping trip. "I miss Cheddar cheese," she said. "I miss dill pickles. I used to eat them from the jar. But *je mariage pour le coeur*"—I marriage for the heart. "With my previous husband, I had the big house, the dishwasher, the works. This is like going from filet mignon to bologna. But it's still beef, and it's good."

Late that evening, we were sitting on the terrace having dinner when a low roar drifted up from the valley. After a while, a helicopter rose into view, then a long cable dangling beneath it, and finally a kidney-shaped basin suspended at the end—a swimming pool destined for some local mansion. "It's for us! It's for us!" Fournier shouted, laughing. He pointed to his back yard. "You can set it right there." The helicopter hovered for a moment in the fading light, then passed into the hills behind us.

The next morning, Fournier and I drove to Aix-en-Provence, where he was scheduled to go skydiving and to meet with some wealthy friends of his doctor's. We stopped at a farmstead halfway there, to drop off some parachutes with a skydiver who folds them for Fournier—an origami-like procedure best performed by experts. Then we wound our way back to the highway, down a long dirt road flanked by plane trees. "Oh, my old *bagnole!*" Fournier said, as his Opel Corsa bounced into another pothole. The car had a hundred and ninety thousand miles on it. Its wipers were broken, its sides dented, its engine prone to overheating at speeds above seventy. "At least the air-conditioner works," he said, winking and rolling down the window. Within a few minutes, the car was so full of dust that he had to roll it back up.

Fournier tries to jump from an airplane every week or so, to maintain his free-falling skills. (In the air, good skydivers can use their arms and legs like acrobats, sending themselves into flips



“We don’t want you inviting friends over to play. There are liability issues.”

• •

and turns, or pulling out of a spin with the smallest gesture.) He belongs to a skydiving club in Aix run by Lionel Delhomme, a grizzled paratrooper he knew in the Air Force, and Marjolaine de Pury, a skydiver in her fifties, who’d been a French champion fourteen years running. They take off from a small airport, land in a nearby cornfield, then roast some sausages and have some wine in the woods beside the field. “Little pleasure leaps,” Fournier calls them.

The airport lay an hour west of Cannes, at Le Luc, next to a military base in the foothills of the Maures Mountains. A low-slung concrete building stood off to the side, with a café in front and an open hangar in back. When we arrived, a few dozen skydivers were lounging about. They looked identical to the crowd I’d seen in Florida, at a drop zone that I’d visited with Kittinger: lean, scraggly, gypsy jumpers with ripped bellies and indolent grins. They wore baggy camouflage pants and no shirts, or spandex suits pulled down around their waists; their skydiving permits dangled from their necks like dog tags. Some sat in the lotus position, packing parachutes on the concrete floor. Others lay on their stomachs, spinning around on oversized skateboards, practicing aerial maneuvers.

Skydiving has evolved into an entirely new sport since Fournier learned it—one concerned less with altitude than with artistry and speed. Hemispheric chutes have given way to small, maneuverable parafoils, bulky batwings to double-layered webbing that inflates in the air. The élite skydivers now hold aerial slalom races, plummeting between poles on a ski slope. Or they pull up from fifty-mile-an-hour dives, trail their toes through the grass, and land on targets a few feet square. In Florida, I’d talked to a skydiver who liked to jump at night, when the space shuttle was being launched, so that he could watch it flaming past him in the sky.

The sport still takes its share of lives—twenty-one in the United States last year. But most accidents are due to hubris or to human error. “It’s better to have died skydiving,” a member of a Dutch team told me, “than not to have lived.”

Fournier had picked up some of the new generation’s lingo and loose manners. He liked to describe things as “hypercool” and insisted on the informal *tu*, even with relative strangers. But the drop zones still made him uncomfortable. Compared with these skydivers’ aerial ballets, his great leap was a complex, cumbersome, physically passive affair—the last gasp of Big Science. While they’d learned to inhabit the sky, he was just hoping to survive it.

The Great Leap would begin as high as a helium balloon could go: a hundred and thirty thousand feet—a quarter again as high as Kittinger went. The trip up would take more than two and a half hours, the trip down less than fifteen minutes. As Fournier rose, the air pressure would drop exponentially, until less than one-tenth of one per cent of the atmosphere remained. As he fell, his body would accelerate almost as if it were in a vacuum. By the time he reached Kittinger’s jump point, he’d be going more than nine hundred miles per hour—one and a half times the speed of sound. There would be no danger of going into orbit at that velocity, or of flaming up like an Apollo space capsule. But the shock wave, passing over him, would feel like a thousand fingertips tapping his body.

“I have confidence in Michel. He is very well trained,” Fournier’s medical director, Paul Vanuxem, a professor of medicine at the University of Aix-Marseilles, told me in June. “But there is reason to be vigilant about the equipment. Even Batman would have problems if you deprived him of oxygen.”

Fournier’s gear, sophisticated though it was, looked roughly like Kittinger’s from forty years before. The balloon was five hundred and thirty-one feet high and three hundred and seventy-seven feet in diameter.The gondola, nearly twenty years old, was a pressurized silver cylinder about the size of a telephone booth, with G.P.S. and an array of cameras and physiological sensors. (“We’ll be able to see your little finger moving from ninety thousand feet,” one of the designers told Fournier.) His space suit, ten years in development, could inflate with oxygen to pressurize his body and withstand temperatures as low as a hundred and fifty degrees below zero for ten minutes.

If everything worked, the leap would be a simple affair—the parachutes would open even if Fournier passed out. But at that altitude things tended to go wrong. Any tear in the insulation, any pinprick in his pressure suit or parachute malfunction, could kill him. Should he pass out, his suit would provide twenty minutes of oxygen. After that, he'd suffocate unless someone took off his helmet. His descent would be tracked by G.P.S. and helicopters in Canada, Vanuxem said. "There is a small risk that he will fall into a lake. But the Canadians will be on standby with their divers."

When Fournier first went to Saskatchewan, in 2002, his equipment and training seemed impeccable. He'd been flung around by a centrifuge in Moscow, had languished in a decompression tank in Marseilles, and been blasted by a giant wind machine in Grenoble. Merely attempting the leap had depended on a long series of contingencies. First, Fournier had to wait for late summer, when the winds a hundred thousand feet above Saskatchewan changed direction and stalled momentarily. Then the jet stream, at thirty-six thousand feet, had to move to the north or south, so that its wind shears wouldn't tear the balloon in half. Then the local weather had to clear and surface winds had to drop below five miles per hour. Fournier didn't know until twelve hours before the launch whether the conditions were right. After that, he had to watch his diet carefully, avoiding any foods that might cause gas, which would expand painfully at higher altitudes. Finally, hours before liftoff, he had to insert a rectal probe to monitor his internal temperature and breathe pure oxygen to clear his blood of nitrogen.

And yet, at the moment of the launch, none of these precautions mattered. As the balloon was being inflated with helium, a gust of wind tore out one of the inflation tubes. By the time it was repaired, bad weather had set in and the jet stream was overhead. The launch had to be postponed for another year.

The following August, Fournier tried again. This time, the air was calm, the hoses well secured. As the helium flowed in, the balloon lurched into the sky and Fournier prepared for liftoff. On films of that day, you can see him sitting in his space capsule, suspended from a crane. The balloon, stretched out on the airport tarmac, begins to rise into the sky—a vast, shimmering envelope trailing its transparent folds beneath it. Then, suddenly, it's over. The top of the balloon ruptures and collapses silently to the ground. A single seam has come undone. "*Merde! Merde! Merde!*" someone shouts. And then, "*C'est pas vrai! C'est pas vrai!*" It can't be true!

Afterward, Fournier was so devastated that he had to be helped off the tarmac, slumped between two of his launch directors. "I was empty, crushed and empty," he told me. "I felt as if I'd been decapitated." Kittinger told him later that he'd once had three balloons burst on him during a single project. But Fournier had no Air Force behind him to bankroll another attempt. "What if it happens again?" I asked. Could he survive another failure? He shook his head. "I can't let myself think about that," he said. Then he showed me two scraps of clear plastic fabric. The first was from a British balloon that he'd used on his previous attempt: a single ply, as thin as Saran Wrap. The second was from his new balloon, made and extensively tested in Russia: three plies quilted firmly together, though still gossamer thin. "This is it," he said. "The balloon of success."

Before I met Fournier, I'd never been skydiving. My fear of heights was such that a good-sized Ferris wheel could send me to my knees. Fournier insisted that this was irrelevant. I would be jumping in tandem with Marjolaine de Pury, the former skydiving champion. The back of my shoulder harness would be hooked to the front of hers, and she'd pull a single parachute for both of us. "Fear of heights, fear of death, fear of a parachute that won't open, *mais c'est normal!*" Fournier said. "Anyone who says he isn't afraid is either a liar or unconscious."

The wind had risen above Le Luc and the day's last flights were leaving. When the shuttle bus dropped us off at the runway, a small square-sided propeller plane was idling by. De Pury pulled at my wrist and led me across the tarmac, then the others piled in behind. There were ten of us in all, crammed into a four-by-six-foot compartment, straddling a thin wooden bench or sitting on the floor. De Pury was wearing a worn leather helmet, like an aviator from the nineteen-twenties, and she had a look of utter competence about her: thick shoulders, sun-mottled skin, cropped gray hair with Raggedy Ann bangs. "You'll see!" Fournier shouted. "It's an experience that grabs you by the tripes."

The plane took off, rattling like a freight car. The tarmac fell away, then the vineyards and fields, and finally the broad green shoulders of the Maures, rolling toward the coast. To the east, the blue Mediterranean tilted into view, with some dun-colored islands scattered offshore. "There's Saint-Tropez," de Pury said, as she tightened the straps connecting us. On a late-fall day, she added, when a mistral blows the skies clear after a rain, you can sometimes see Corsica. Fournier turned to explain something, and gave me a thumbs-up, but I couldn't hear him. The plane had climbed to fourteen thousand feet by then, and my ears had gone deaf in the unpressurized cabin.

When the door slid open and the others began tumbling out—so much farther and faster than expected—I thought for a moment that I might just stick around, wait this one out. Then de Pury was behind me, shoving me toward the door, and out into the empty sky.

I later found that two pens had exploded in my pocket as I fell. The wind, blasting upward at a hundred and twenty miles an hour, peeled a contact lens from my left eyeball and pasted it to the inside of my goggles. At the moment of the leap, de Pury had said, novices and old-timers experience almost equal jolts of adrenaline. Still, when I glanced up in mid free fall and saw Fournier floating toward me, he looked perfectly at ease. His knees were bent, his hands cupping the air, his eyes groggy with contentment. "What do I see? The earth!" he'd told me the night before, on his terrace in Bendejun, as he imagined his great leap. "What do I do? I jump! . . . I jump, then I stabilize. I open my chute. The adrenaline goes *swoooooo!* Seven minutes of dream! . . . It *will* happen."

He hung there for a moment, a few yards in front of me, grinning in the late-afternoon sun—nothing but pleasure and happiness. Then he straightened his legs, flattened his arms at his sides, and plunged like an arrow back to earth. ♦

FICTION

MAGDA MANDELA

BY HARI KUNZRU

It is 4:30 A.M. and Magda would like us, her neighbors, to know that she is a very talented woman, a woman of accomplishments. Magda is a nurse, a qualified pilot, a businesswoman and a philanthropist, a gifted and sensitive lover, the holder of certificates in computing and English grammar, a semi-professional country singer, and a mother. Yes, a mother! Magda has a daughter. Who came out of this pussy right here.

Right here, she says. Out of this pussy. RIGHT HERE. And all along the street we come to our windows to twitch the net curtains and face the awe-inspiring truth that is Magda in her lime-green thong. She's standing on the top step, the lights of the house blazing behind her, a terrifying mash-up of the Venus of Willendorf and a Victoria's Secret catalogue, making gestures with a beer can at the little knot of emergency-service personnel gathered on the pavement below.

One of the younger and less experienced constables has obviously asked her to accompany him to a place where, as an agent of the state, he will feel less exposed. A police station, perhaps. Or a hospital. Anywhere that will tip the odds a little in his favor. Magda has met this suggestion with the scorn it deserves. She knows that she outnumbers these fools. YOU KNOW ME, she says. Then, with a sinister leer, AND I KNOW YOU.

Being known by Magda is a messy and unavoidably carnal experience. All of us neighbors have been known by Magda. Last time she knew me, she pushed me up against the side of my car. I know you, she breathed huskily. And I knew I'd been known.

In their big reflective jackets, the policemen appear crumpled and insubstantial. They are visibly trying to block out the knowledge of her knowledge, no doubt using the mental techniques they were taught at the training school: *I am a powerful person. I control my own destiny.* Behind the ambulance, one of the paramedics is taking a quick nip of oxygen.

They clearly don't realize what they're up against. Magda is the daughter of Nelson Mandela, major world leader and savior of his country. Don't these Day-Glo fools see the resemblance? If they have any doubts, ANY DOUBTS AT ALL, she tells them, they have only to consult the autobiography "Long Road to Freedom." Read the autobiography! Read page 37 and page 475! They will see. THEN THEY WILL KNOW.

Magda is coated in something that I suspect is coconut oil. She has the air of a woman who has roused herself from titanic erotic exertions to be here with us on Westerbury Road tonight. She has been INTERRUPTED. She has THINGS TO DO. There is no sign of Errol. I hope he's all right. Errol is quite fragile.

Magda lives in Errol's house. This is a scandal on Westerbury Road, because Errol is a widower in his seventies, who brought up a family and was expected to eke away his twilight years on D.I.Y., Sunday church, and the occasional tot of Wray & Nephew rum. However, Errol likes Wray & Nephew more than he likes church, and last year (according to Lauren, at No. 20) he met Magda at a lock-in at the Victoria Arms, one of the least salubrious pubs in our little corner of East London. I've been to one of those lock-ins. They do get frisky. Magda is at least thirty, possibly forty years younger than Errol. For a while after she moved in, he pottered around with a smile on his grizzled face, raffishly touching the brim of his baseball cap to us neighbors and whistling as he swept the leaves off his front steps. These days, he wears the sour expression of a man who's been cheated at cards.

What Errol signed up for was a bit of bounce and warmth and comfort on cold nights. Instead, he's been swept into a world of grand operatic passion. Between Magda and Errol there is a love that can spill out in many directions. It has left Magda sleeping in a rolled-up carpet on the pavement and Errol hobbling across the street to take refuge in my kitchen; during Old Testament times, Errol prefers to keep a door between the two of them—and who can blame him for that? Magda's wrath is sharp and terrible. It involves a lot of casting out and smiting. The recently smitten include: Errol (obviously), Lauren at No. 20, the Meals on Wheels lady, and several council workmen whom Magda battered with one of the stock of road cones she keeps in the front yard. Magda leaves Errol at least once a month. Sometimes Errol throws her out. Frequently, instead of leaving him, she punishes him by going to the Victoria Arms and finding a young man to bring home and sit with on the steps. For a day or two, Errol will look grim and spend a lot of time in the betting shop. Then things will go back to normal.

Magda must be excused her foibles, because she is wrestling with the great question of her life: old man or young man? Both have their pluses. Young men have more energy and are less scandalous, unless they smoke crack on the steps or go telling lies to Errol. Old men are more dignified and have houses. Old men are Magda's weakness: I LIKE A OLD MAN. She mentioned her inclinations to my father (seventy this year) when he came to visit the other week. There was a commotion outside, and I found Magda knowing him against a lamppost. You are a old man, she purred appreciatively, rubbing up and down against his leg. I like a old man.

Old man, young man. Which will it be? For all her turbulence, Magda is concerned about the proprieties. She values the good opinion of us neighbors. The other night, she came out onto the steps to explain her relationship with Errol. My neighbors, she said, I must tell you why I am here. We rose from our beds and came to our windows. I AM HIS NURSE. He is a old man. He can't satisfy a woman like me. He is limp and goes to sleep. I need more of a man than such a one. I am a qualified nurse, a gifted woman. He is like a father to me. The problem with you people is this. I will tell you now: You all have dirty minds. Filthy dirty. I think I have said enough. Now fuck off.

As neighbors, we often fail Magda in this way—with our prurience, our tendency to jump to conclusions. She frequently has to chastise us. Occasionally, she does a round of the street and casts us out one by one, which is effortful and very time-consuming. Tonight, before the arrival of emergency services, she was berating us for our pride and our materialism. I KNOW YOU, she told us. You think you have HOUSES. In Notting Hill they have HOUSES. I have seen them with my own eyes. In such a house is my friend. A young man, not old and worn out at all. Ten, twelve bathrooms at a time in such houses. Enough bathrooms.

On nights such as tonight, Magda likes to sing. She particularly likes an audience

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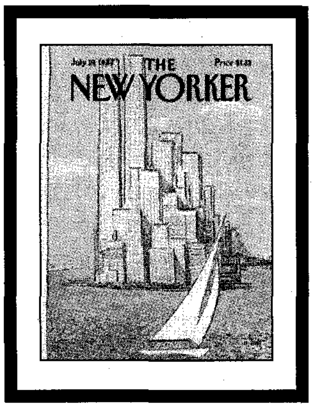

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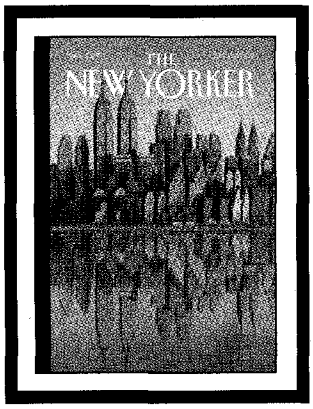


Gürbüz Dogan Eksioglu, 2003

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE CARTOON BANK

in uniform. You're my best friend, she sings. I love you, but you don't love me. This song is freely adapted from her CD of country-music hymns, the one she plays to get into a churchgoing mood on Sunday mornings. Magda has built her own semi-professional singing career around such material. She has appeared in Cape Town and Tottenham and Dalston, she says. Musically speaking, Magda's congregation must be more avant-garde than most: although her voice is an extraordinary phenomenon, it's not tonal, at least not as we usually understand tonality.

Sometimes when Magda comes out onto the steps and speaks, I sit bolt upright in bed. Sometimes it's as if she were in the room with me. My girlfriend has the same experience. Magda's voice is not simply loud. Loud, yes, but not just loud. It has the penetrative force of a piece of heavy industrial equipment, something with a diamond bit or tempered-steel blades. Often it seems disconnected from her body, as if it were emerging from the bathroom or from under the floorboards or the far end of Westerbury Road. When you look at Magda, who is quite short and (when dressed) usually looks neat and more or less conventionally contained inside herself, you'd never guess that she possessed such a voice. And, in a way, she doesn't, or at least that's what I believe. I think she's merely the voice's host, its point of entry into the continuum of Westerbury Road.

Magda's Voice Theory No. 1: Dimensionality. She is the portal through which the voice emerges. There must be some other world, unimaginably fraught and violent, contiguous to ours but not normally permeable.

Magda's Voice Theory No. 2: Concerning the Nature of Higher-Order Spaces. Its eerie ability to project into my thickly curtained bedroom is evidence of some force as yet unknown to science. Corollary: perhaps higher-order spaces are denser, more difficult as a medium for conversation.

Magda is racked by tremendous passions. Wake up, my neighbors, she will often command. Wake up and listen. Tonight I love you. I love you, my neighbors. I am filled with love. But you do not love me, so I say to you this: I DON'T GIVE A FUCK ABOUT YOU. That is the truth. Fuck off now. Go. Magda loves us, but she spurns us just as we spurn her. She spurns us out of the vastness of her love. Sometimes she is unhappy, and then she will tell us, I am dying. Yes, I have a pain and I am dying, my neighbors. You don't love me. I am dying, and you don't even know. I love you, but I don't give a fuck about you. Go now. Go away. Fuck off. Go. I love you. Go. Once she has delivered her tragic message, she will disappear inside to call an ambulance. When it comes, she will be ready on the steps with an overnight case. Having told the paramedics briefly about her pain, she will push past them and sit in the back, waiting to go, fuck off, go.

Magda's Voice Theory No. 3: Metaphysical Origins. After a recent row with Errol, Magda brought home a young Muslim to sit on the steps. He wore a *dishdash* and a white skullcap. He had a wispy beard and a cardboard suitcase and a bemused expression. I think she'd found him at the station. He looked about twenty-one. Magda waved her rum bottle and told him about the thieves who sometimes steal her parking space. She demonstrated her concern for parking security on Westerbury Road by making a few minor alterations to the construction of wooden planks and road cones she uses to protect the space outside Errol's house. I wasn't sure the boy spoke English. From the suitcase, I'd say he had just arrived in London. Still, he listened intently, ignoring the bottle in her hand. Even if he didn't understand the words, he seemed to recognize something, something worth listening to. Could he have heard divinity in Magda's voice? At one point that afternoon, I passed the steps on my way to the shops. She called out to me, Don't worry, he's my brother. He has very dirty ears. I'm just checking his ears.

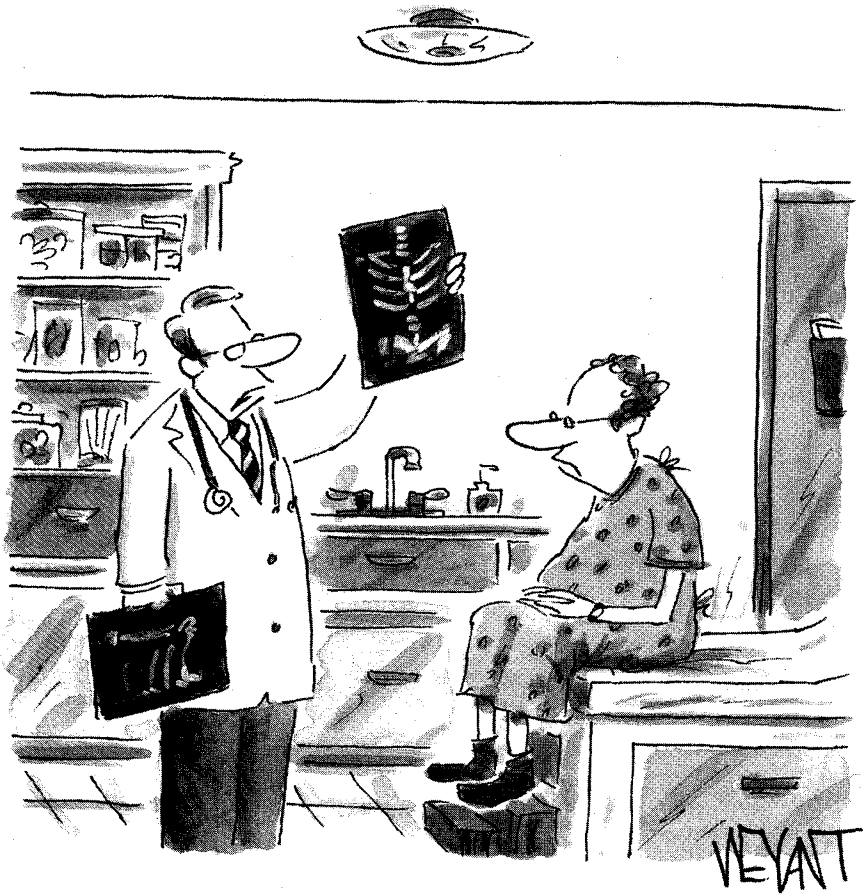
It's gradually dawning on the policemen that they will have to effect an arrest. It will be a slippery business. I wonder if they train for this. Are there special holds? Written protocols? Magda can see the way their devious minds are working. She has the element of surprise. I KNOW YOU, she warns sportingly.

Andy the drummer chooses this moment to drive down the road and park outside his house. He has been out late, gigging somewhere. He once told me that he gets a lot of work in Leeds. Andy is a favorite of Magda's. All right, boy, she says. You. Yes, you with the red car. I love you. I've seen this car many a time. I've seen this car a lot of times, I tell you. Go away now. I've done with you. Go, O.K.? Fuck you. You probably have a small cock. Go. Andy waves to her and starts unloading his drum kit. YOU ARE A YOUNG MAN, she calls out, blowing him a kiss.

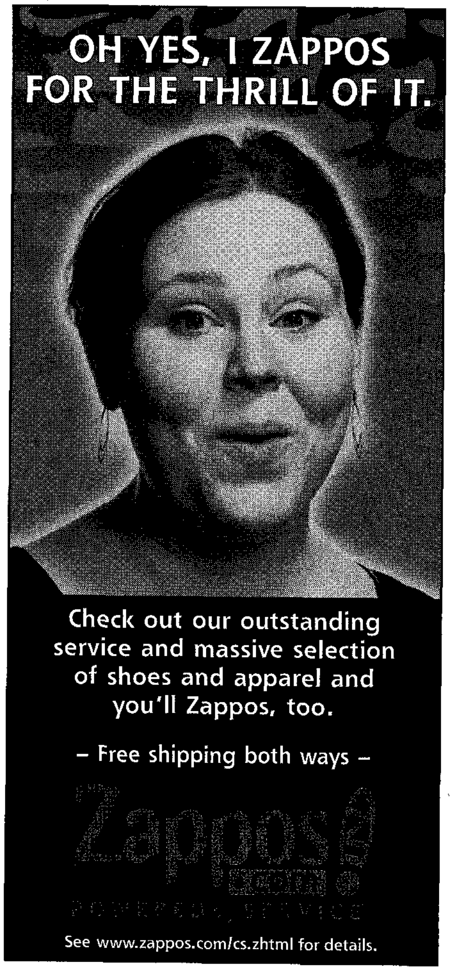
Thinking she is distracted, the policemen advance up the steps. Magda emits a long high-pitched wail, which rattles the windows and pierces deep into the souls of us neighbors, watching from our upstairs windows.

M.V.T. No. 4: A survival from the ancient world? Primal, atavistic. Greek mourner. Mammoth feller. She slithers out of their grasp, waddling down the street in the direction of the main road. Though she's slow, she has a chaotic, lumbering motion that makes her hard to catch. At last, two of the policemen grab hold of her, one gripping her arms, the other circling her waist in a sort of static rugby tackle, his head pressed into the flesh of her stomach, so that he's eyeballing the triangle of acid-green nylon that is all that stands between his nose and her most intimate zones. Magda's fierce resistance reminds me of the time when her need for a young man led her to climb into the basement of No. 18, where a crew of builders were fitting a kitchen. As they cowered behind the sink unit, she wedged herself halfway through the sash window. I LIVE WITH A OLD MAN, she growled, wiggling and straining. I have a condom. Line up. I am ready.

Walkie-talkies crackle. Doors slam. Magda is placed inside the police van, and I climb back into bed. For a few minutes, red and blue lights make flashing patterns on my ceiling, then all is quiet and dark on Westerbury Road. Magda will be back tomorrow. They never keep her for long. She'll sulk for a day or two, listening to pirate radio in Errol's back garden, then she'll forgive us and return to her place on the front steps. What we her thieving-neighbors-so-smug-in-our-houses don't know is the power of love. Love conquers all. One day we'll discover that this is true, and then we'll be sorry. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if we returned Magda's love. If we believed in her, she could do great things for us. But our problem is that we are faithless. Our problem is that we are stupid. Our problem is that we just don't listen. ♦



"I don't like the look of these. I better send them up to legal."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THE CRITICS

POP MUSIC

HIGH AND MIGHTY

Lil Wayne takes over hip-hop.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Dwayne Carter, the twenty-four-year-old rapper from New Orleans known as Lil Wayne, hasn't released an album or a single in months, though he has appeared as a guest on songs by other artists. But he is indisputably the rapper of the year. He has been recording songs constantly—sometimes three or four a night. Many are astonishingly good, and most eventually find their way onto the Internet, where they can be downloaded for free, apparently with his blessing. Among hip-hop fans, discussion has been dominated by talk of Lil Wayne—his place in the hip-hop canon, his romantic status, his sexual orientation, and the release date of his sixth album, "Tha Carter III." Last week, MTV's "hip-hop brain trust"—ten staffers—voted Lil Wayne the "hottest m.c. in the game."

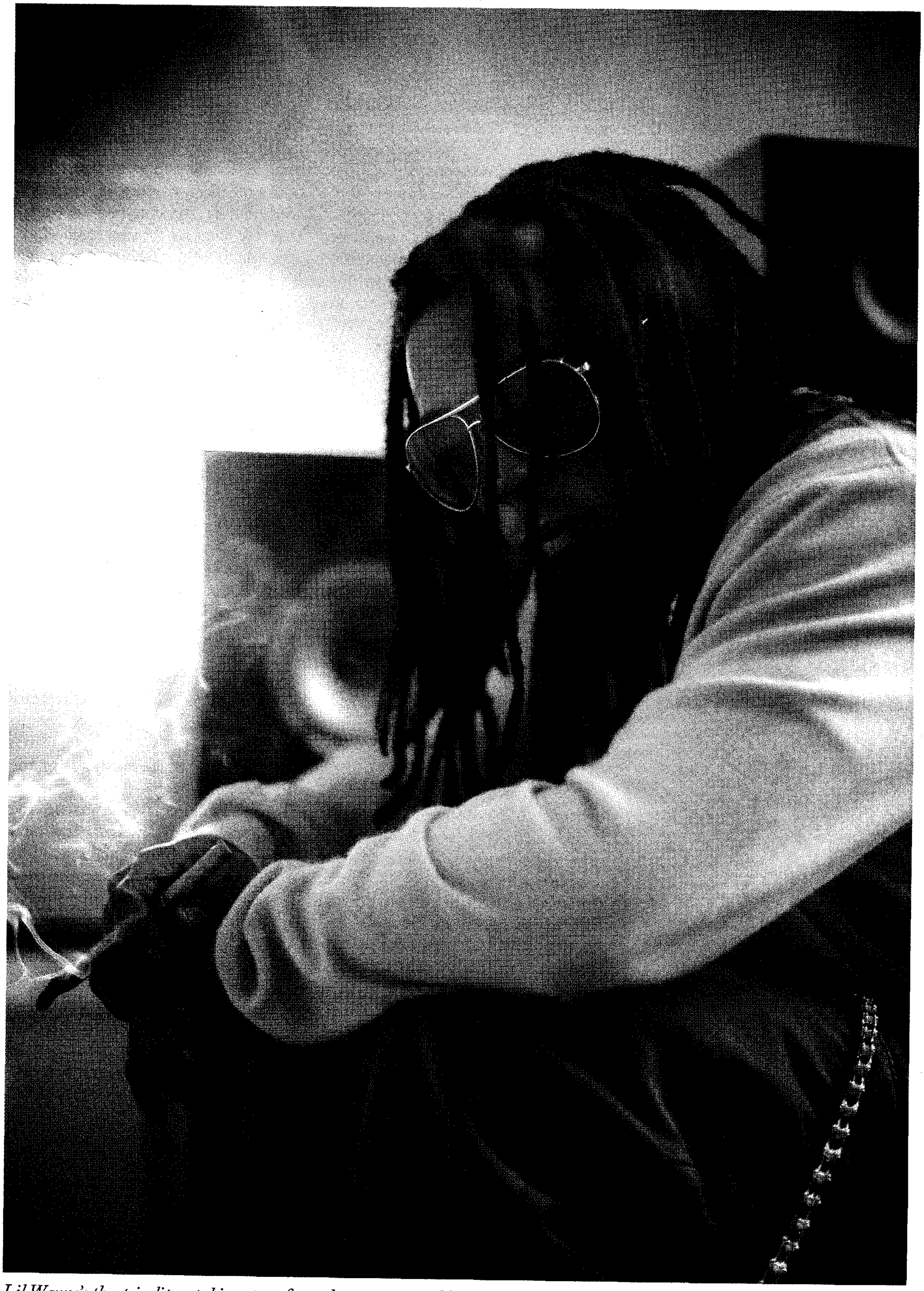
In four years, Lil Wayne has evolved from a fairly predictable Southern gangsta rapper into an artist who may actually deserve the bragging rights to "best rapper alive," his current motto. His raspy, pixillated croak is as distinctive as Bob Dylan's piercing Klaxon whine, and his music conveys the same sense of headlong propulsion that Dylan's did in 1965. (Lil Wayne's subject matter—drugs, women, and gunplay—is more typical of the blues songs that Dylan idolized than of Dylan's own material.) Lil Wayne's verse on DJ Khaled's "We Takin' Over," which was released in March, is thirty seconds of uncontrolled id: he sounds demented enough to make the gothic boast "I am the beast—feed me rappers or feed me beats" seem like empirical description. The material that Lil Wayne (or his associates) has posted on the Internet so far this year could make up several albums, and the range of the work is impressive. On "Something You Forgot," he delivers self-critique and emotional vulnerability: "Pain—since I've lost you, I'm lost, too. Nigga feeling like he at the bottom, like a horseshoe." On "Kush," he strings together loopy rhymes about tooth fairies, turtles, and marijuana, and on "Did It Before," over a beat by Kanye West that could be a sample of a New Orleans funk band, he tells a shaggy-dog story about promiscuity.

Lil Wayne grew up in Hollygrove, a working-class neighborhood known for producing R. & B. singers and hip-hop m.c.s, and began his career unusually young. When he was eleven, he befriended Bryan (Baby) Williams, a rapper and the co-owner of a highly successful New Orleans hip-hop label called Cash Money. Lil Wayne recorded rhymes on Williams's answering machine and hung around the label's offices. Williams mentored the genuinely little Wayne, including him in various group recordings, and in 1999, when Lil Wayne was seventeen, released his first solo album, "Tha Block Is Hot." Cash Money made its name by putting out a cheap and dirty gangsta rap that featured all the threats and braggadocio that you could find anywhere else but also a uniquely lighthearted swagger and supple cadences that made even the dorkiest boast appealing. (Lil Wayne was already enough of a ham to know that stage-whispering the phrase "the block is hot, the block is hot" sounded more threatening than yelling it.)

Lil Wayne reached a national audience with his 2004 hit "Go D.J.," a pulsing, bass-heavy series of exclamations, but it was his fifth album, "Tha Carter II" (2005), that secured his reputation. His voice had acquired a pleasing gravelly texture and his jokes were funnier: "Quick Draw McGraw, I went to art school. Yeah, the lights is bright, but I got a short fuse—don't snooze. Been handling the game so long my thumbs bruised" (from the single "Fireman"). Lil Wayne is uninhibited about using a variety of vocal tricks—quavers, comic growls, reedy hollers—to make his words stand out. His theatricality, even more than his energy and sense of rhythm, sets him apart from the monotonous blowhards of thugdom.

In December, Lil Wayne announced in the hip-hop magazine *Complex* that he had superseded Jay-Z, who had been regarded by many—including Lil Wayne—as the best rapper in the business. "It's not your house anymore and I'm better than you," Lil Wayne said. Jay-Z took the bait, eventually releasing a lacklustre rebuttal in the form of a guest verse on the rapper T.I.'s song "Watch What You Say," in which he disparages Lil Wayne for smoking "cannabis." It's hard to imagine that Lil Wayne, who has boasted of being so high that he "could eat a star," was insulted. Soon afterward, though, he issued a reply—featured on a track called "Beat Without Bass," by the rapper Freekey Zekey—in which he made fun of Jay-Z's advanced age (for a rapper) by exploiting a numerical conceit from Jay-Z's song "22 Two's": "You old-ass rappers better stay on tour. You're like forty-four, I got a .44, I'm twenty-four. I could murk you and come home when I'm forty-four."

The victor in this argument was evident in another set of numbers: Jay-Z hasn't bothered to respond to Lil Wayne and, apart from his contribution to "Watch What You Say," has appeared just twice in 2007, notably as a guest on Rihanna's smash pop hit "Umbrella." Meanwhile, Lil Wayne has appeared on



Lil Wayne's theatricality sets him apart from the monotonous blowhards of thugdom. Photograph by Piotr Sikora.

songs by nearly every major rapper—including one with T.I.—as well as tracks by several R. & B. singers.

Jay-Z, who is actually thirty-seven, is the C.E.O. of Def Jam, a major label that still does business the twentieth-century way, selling records in stores. Lil Wayne's commercial releases are distributed by another major label, Universal, but, by posting his songs for free on the Internet and, in the process, acquiring new fans, he is proving that the established methods of distribution, like the established rappers, no longer rule. His recent releases have taken the form of mix tapes—compilations of original songs interspersed with tracks in which the artist records new lyrics over another artist's well-known beat—and they contain his best work to date.

The lazy psychedelic anthem "I Feel Like Dying," a collaboration with the producer Jim Jonsin that appeared on the Internet in June, is one of the few songs about drugs that sound as if both the music and the musician are high. The music is based on a sample from "Once," a bleak acoustic-guitar ballad from 2003 by Karma, a South African singer-songwriter who lives in Miami. Jonsin sped up Karma's voice and rearranged her lyrics to create a new chorus: "Only once the drugs are done, then I feel like dying." Karma sounds pained, but Lil Wayne doesn't seem to be feeling much of anything. Over a jumpy kick-drum pattern, he recites his words slowly, separating each phrase with a long, narcotic pause that threatens to dissolve the rhythm: "In a marijuana field, you are so beneath my cleats. . . . I can mingle with the stars and throw a party on Mars. I am a prisoner locked up behind Xanax bars."

Lil Wayne is wide awake on "Help," a track driven by a sample of the Beatles song, which his lawyers at Universal would probably have had a hard time getting permission for him to use on an album. (Some rappers who give away mix tapes on the Internet try to avoid litigation by claiming that their sampling falls under the doctrine of "fair use" and by pointing out that they aren't selling anything.) "So sick, need a doc, yes—a creature, monster like the Loch Ness," Lil Wayne chants, relying on a combination of tart duplets and sixteenth notes to deliver his boasts. "I gets hotter by the tock; when I sizzle to death, I just tell the clock, 'Give me a sec.' "

On YouTube, there was recently a clip of Lil Wayne performing this song in April, on BET's "Rap City." Instead of using the Beatles sample, though, he raps over a nineteen-seventies reggae track, stretching out the song in a sly, woozy style. He mugs for the camera, illustrating a line about bloodshot eyes by raising his sunglasses, closing his eyes, and smiling. Later, he waves his hands in mock fear as he says, "I hear the track, I'm like an energy pack. The instruments are crying out, 'Where the sympathy at?'"

Last month, Lil Wayne played his first solo show in New York, at the Beacon Theatre. It was a solidly old-world, real-time complement to his cyber-age record-making, and he demonstrated that his self-regard may well be justified. After a ninety-minute set of current hits, played by the New York d.j. Self, Lil Wayne, accompanied by the rapper Mack Maine, entered the theatre to high-pitched screaming. He was wearing several enormous diamond necklaces over a faded Run-DMC T-shirt, a nod to the legendary New York rap duo who dominated hip-hop twenty years ago, the way Lil Wayne and the South do now.

Lil Wayne's stage manner is as unpredictable as his lyrics. During a performance of "Fireman," he punched the air and stomped. Moments later, he and Maine, moving into a chorus-line formation, leaned back and snapped their fingers in unison, and then leaped around the stage. Between songs, Lil Wayne repeatedly asked the crowd to "make some noise for your motherfucking selves." He added, "I wouldn't be shit without you," and he seemed to mean it. (An hour after the show ended, police boarded Lil Wayne's tour bus and arrested him. He was charged with possessing an unlicensed handgun and has pleaded not guilty.)

In June, Lil Wayne announced in a videotape on YouTube that he had decided to give away the tracks for his upcoming album, "Tha Carter III," on a mix tape called "The Leak." Noting that the songs had already leaked on the Internet, he added cheerfully, "I must take better care of my things, and I will." ♦

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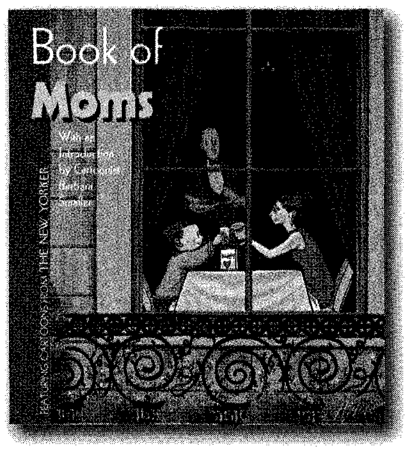

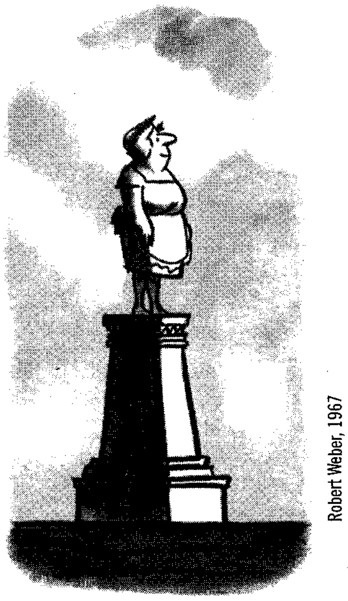

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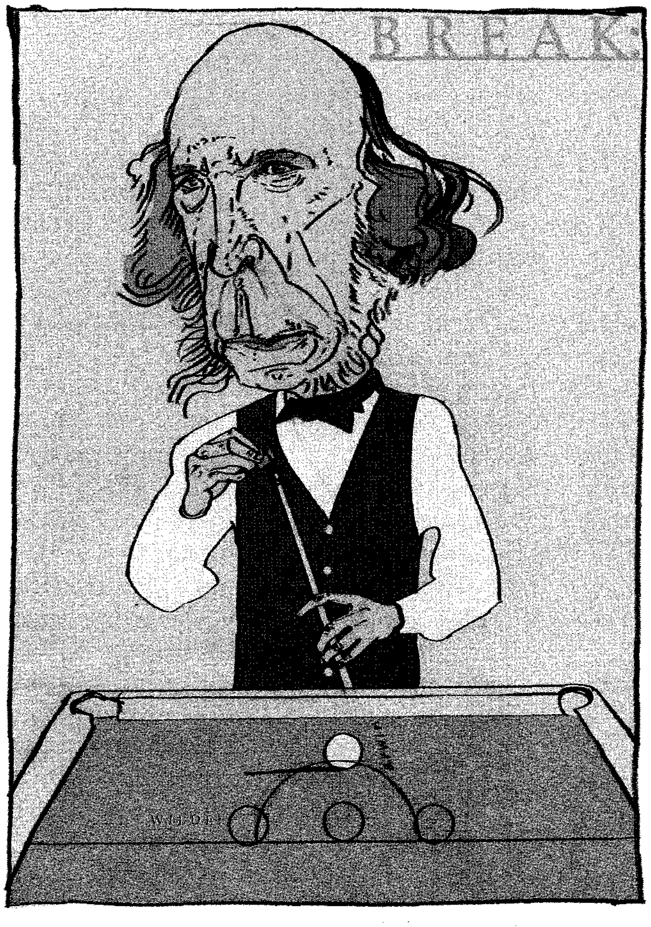
A CRITIC AT LARGE

MAN WITH A PLAN

Herbert Spencer's theory of everything.

BY STEVEN SHAPIN

The great event of the New York cultural season of 1882 was the visit of the sixty-two-year-old English philosopher and social commentator Herbert Spencer. Nowhere did Spencer have a larger or more enthusiastic following than in the United States, where such works as "Social Statics" and "The Data of Ethics" were celebrated as powerful justifications for laissez-faire capitalism. Competition was preordained; its result was progress; and any institution that stood in the way of individual liberties was violating the natural order. "Survival of the fittest"—a phrase that Charles Darwin took from Spencer—made free competition a social as well as a natural law. Andrew Carnegie admired Spencer enormously and attributed to him the decisive metaphysical epiphany of his life: "I remember that light came as in a flood and all was clear. . . . I had found the truth of evolution. 'All is well since all grows better' became my motto, my true source of comfort." Thanks to Spencer, Victorian capitalists knew that nature was on their side.



Spencer's many followers read him in wildly divergent ways.

DAVID HUGHES

Spencer had not come to America to give lectures or to boost his book sales. He detested public speaking, and he no longer needed money, thanks to the immense popularity of his books. A lifelong hypochondriac, he had come for his health, to reinvigorate his "greatly disordered nervous system," and he withstood all inducements to what he called "social excitement." But the press of distinguished American Spencerians was too great to resist, and he agreed to a farewell banquet at Delmonico's on November 9th.

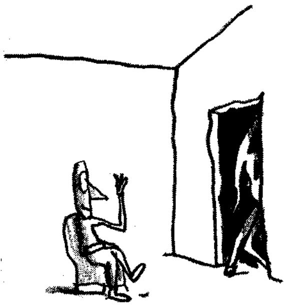
Senators, captains of industry, and professors were there in force, vying with each other in the fulsomeness of their praise. The former Secretary of State William Evarts said that Spencer was the smartest man in the world: "We recognize in the breadth of your knowledge, such knowledge as is useful to your race, a greater comprehension than any living man has presented to our generation." The Union Army general Carl Schurz declared that there would have been no Civil War if the South had been adequately instructed in Spencer's principles of individual liberty. And the president of Columbia, Frederick Barnard, announced that Herbert Spencer was "not only the profoundest thinker of our time, but the most capacious and most powerful intellect of all time."

The Delmonico's dinner, however, ended in disaster. Instead of graciously bathing in the torrents of tribute, Spencer told his admirers that they had got him seriously wrong. He did *not* approve of the culture of American capitalism, and, while he admired its material achievements, he was concerned that, for Americans, work had become a pathological obsession. Americans were endangering their mental and physical health through overwork, and many were turning gray before their time—ten years earlier than the British, Spencer believed. America needed "a revised ideal of life," he said, and it was time to "preach the gospel of relaxation." He went on, "Life is not for learning, nor is life for working, but learning and working are for life." Having administered that slap to the face of national virtue, Spencer steamed off back to England.

Spencer was, arguably, the single most influential systematic thinker of the nineteenth century, but his influence, compared with that of Darwin, Marx, or Mill, was short-lived. In 1937, the Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons asked, "Who now reads Spencer?" Seventy years later, the question remains pertinent, even if no one now reads Talcott Parsons, either. In his day, Spencer was the greatest of philosophical hedgehogs: his popularity stemmed from the fact that he had one big, easily grasped idea and a mass of more particular ideas that supposedly flowed from the big one. The big idea was evolution, but, while Darwin applied it to species change, speculating about society and culture only with reluctance, Spencer saw evolution working everywhere. "This law of organic progress is the law of all progress," he wrote, "whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of

Commerce, of Language, Literature, Science, [or] Art." Spencer has been tagged as a social Darwinist, but it would be more correct to think of Darwin as a biological Spencerian. Spencer was very well known as an evolutionist long before Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" was published, in 1859, and people who had limited interest in the finches of the Galápagos had a great interest in whether the state should provide for the poor or whether it was right to colonize India.

William James once ungenerously remarked that Spencer was "the philosopher whom those who have no other philosopher can appreciate." He was appropriated by a wide variety of readers, often with conflicting agendas—free marketeers, positivists, Indian and Japanese nationalists. They all had their understandings of Spencer and they all differed. Mark Francis, in "Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life" (Cornell; $45)—the first full-scale intellectual biography of Spencer since J. D. Y. Peel's fine "Herbert Spencer: The Evolution of a Sociologist" (1971)—is determined to put an end to the confusion. He thinks that he has discovered the philosophical grounds of Spencer's true coherence, and he hands out academic demerits to the commentators who have missed the underlying unities of Spencer's scientific, philosophical, ethical, psychological, sociological, and political writings. Still, for the most part the misreaders should be forgiven. Over almost half a century of furious writing, Spencer continually reworked and reconfigured his views, copying and pasting chunks of text from the eighteen-fifties into volumes published in the eighteen-seventies and eighties.



How, then, to get Spencer right? One suggestion comes from Spencer himself: if you want to understand the origin and lineage of his ideas, you should understand where he came from and how he was formed. He put his immense talent and energy into his philosophical and political works but his genius into his "Autobiography," a work more than a thousand pages long, on which he labored intermittently during the last two decades of his life. This is where Spencer wished people to go when they wanted to grasp how his philosophical system came to be and how its parts related to one another.

Spencer was born in Derby in 1820, the only surviving child in a dissenting, politically radical family. "Individuality was pronounced in all members of the family," he wrote, "and pronounced individuality is necessarily more or less at variance with authority." His father, George Spencer, a philosophical materialist with Quaker sympathies and violently anti-clerical attitudes, was a reformist schoolteacher, a not very successful lace manufacturer, and a sometime inventor. It was from his father that Herbert picked up his passion for science and engineering, and also the value he placed on the forms and manners of individuality. "My father would never take off his hat to anyone, no matter of what rank," Herbert proudly explained, and would never address anyone as "Esquire" or "Reverend," but only as "Mr."

Like son, like father: George Spencer was emotionally brittle. Shortly after Herbert was born, George suffered a breakdown. He became unable to control his anger, which erupted at the slightest provocation. Spencer's "Autobiography" gives an appalling account of his parents' miserable marriage—his mother's passivity, his father's rages and sullen coldness. Not bred to domestic affection, he intermittently craved company and even took a quasi-paternal interest in the children of friends, but, throughout his life, he found emotional intimacy extremely difficult and physical intimacy, apparently, impossible.

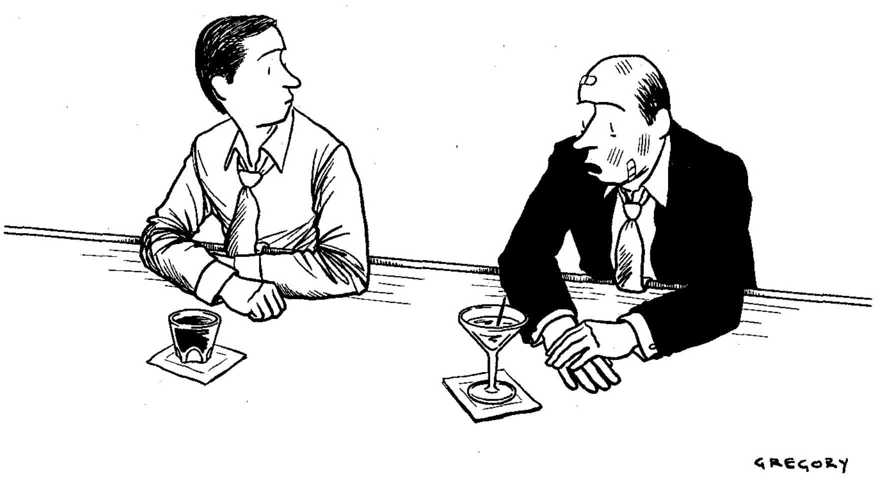
When he was thirteen, Herbert was sent to be educated by his uncle Thomas Spencer, a clergyman living near Bath who shared George's mixture of idealism and irascibility. Herbert recalled, "The daily acts of domestic life did not exhibit that power of self-sacrifice which was called out on important occasions." (He very soon decided to run away, covering a hundred and fifteen miles in three days, but was returned to his uncle immediately.) Herbert's stay with Thomas Spencer, during which he was taught some mathematics, physics, and Latin, constituted his last years of formal education. Through the rest of his life, he was an insatiable autodidact. This was a background that made it hard for him to launch a career. Initially, he worked as a railway engineer and wrote on political and technical topics for a variety of small journals.

In 1848, at twenty-eight, Spencer surveyed his life and found it "unprofitable." (He meant it literally; he thought that his talents had yielded far too little money.) But that year he received an offer to work as a subeditor on *The Economist*, founded five years before to expound the principles of free trade. The job meant a move to London, and that brought him into contact with a wide range of radical thinkers, and in 1851 he produced his first major book, "Social Statics." This work, which sought to establish the rights of individuals and the duties of the state and their limits, was an attempt to find a natural basis for proper political action. Spencer was certain that "nature will be obeyed": ill-advised governments and other social institutions could hamper the operation of natural law—and thus stand in the way of inevitable progress—but they could do almost nothing to assist evolution and hence make things better. Spencer here was offering scientific justifications for individualism and for a minimalist state. Governments, for example, had no obligation, or even right, to protect the health of their subjects. Any effort at licensing and regulating medical practitioners would, he said, "violate the moral law": "The invalid is at liberty to buy medicine and advice from whomsoever he pleases; the unlicensed practitioner is at liberty to sell these to whomsoever will buy." No government should compel vaccination, require children to be educated, keep small boys from sweeping chimneys, mandate the construction of sewers, set standards for telegraph systems, or, of course, relieve poverty.

The logic of the position was that anyone could opt out of the state, and Spencer was at ease with that logic: people had the right of "voluntary outlawry"; they were "free to drop connection with the state—to relinquish its protection, and to refuse paying toward its support." Provided you didn't call on the state to defend you, you didn't have to pay taxes; you had, in fact, a moral and natural "right to ignore the state." Individual charity might have a refining effect on the character of the donor, but poor relief from the state engendered irresponsibility in recipients while embittering those whose resources went to fund it: "There could hardly be found a more efficient device for estranging men from each other, and decreasing their fellow-feeling, than this system of state-almsgiving. Being kind by proxy!—could anything be more blighting to the finer instincts?" He went on, "The ultimate result of shielding men from the effects of folly, is to fill the world with fools." A keen reader of Thomas Malthus, Spencer knew that recipients of poor relief would show their gratitude by becoming even more irresponsible, and that "idiots, imbeciles, drunkards, lunatics, paupers, and prostitutes" would multiply to absorb the resources made available, becoming "an increasing curse" to the society that meant to help them. In his late work "The Man Versus the State" (1884), he asserted that social welfare corrupted morals as well as fitness:

> When, in war-time, "food for powder" was to be provided by encouraging population—when Mr. Pitt said, "Let us make relief in cases where there are a number of children a matter of right and honour, instead of a ground for opprobrium and contempt"; it was not expected that the poor-rates would be quadrupled in fifty years, that women with many bastards would be preferred as wives to modest women, because of their incomes from the parish.

Spencer became so closely associated with this wholesale rejection of state intervention in social welfare that, in 1905, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, defending New York State's regulation of working hours, declared that "the Fourteenth Amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's 'Social Statics.'" Given Spencer's unabashed hard-heartedness, it may come as a surprise that he was an enthusiast for theoretical selflessness and one of the earliest users of the word "altruism," though his version of altruism prominently included the cruel-to-be-kind variety.



"Since we don't have children, my ex turned the cats against me."

• •

For Spencer, the "fundamental law" governing social life could not be more obvious: "Every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man." Yet if the fundamental law was clear and coherent, its applications to the contingencies of social life were not, and this gap in Spencer's scheme between principle and practice proved a fertile source of misunderstanding. For example, natural and moral law required that all people should compete on a level playing field, but in practice land and other property were inequitably distributed, as the result of ancient crimes. And so this supposedly laissez-faire writer advocated both a progressive death tax and the nationalization of land, projects that put him on the side of the socialists he so vigorously attacked. The role of the state was, ideally, supposed to be minimal, but the fundamental law also meant, for Spencer, that equal justice ought to be guaranteed, and this, in turn, underwrote proposals for a vast extension of systems of free legal aid, far in excess of anything we have today.

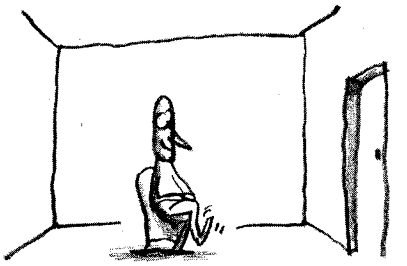
Spencer the libertarian and Spencer the socialist both derived from Spencer the philosopher, and nowhere is Spencer's political inconsistency more apparent than in his views on women. He held that "the rights of women are equal with those of men," that the political disenfranchisement of women was, therefore, unnatural and immoral, and that "a people's condition may be judged by the treatment which women receive under it." But, over time, his position on women changed, and he dissociated himself from the movement for universal suffrage and what he called "the screaming sisterhood." In some indefinite future, the time might be right, but, as matters currently stood, women manifested "a worship of power under all its forms; and hence a relative conservatism." Enfranchised women would tend to vote for authoritarian figures, and so obstruct the natural law of progress toward an egalitarian society. Similarly, although free access to higher education seems to flow logically from his position on women's rights, Spencer thought that women were, in the main, more impulsive, more kindly to the undeserving, less capable of abstract thinking. The scientific doctrine of the conservation of vital forces meant that all energies expended on mental activity drained those available for animal functions. Cerebral activity makes enormous demands on vital energy, and "if expenditure is excessive it cannot be met without deduction from that reserve power which should go to race-maintenance." Reading interfered with breeding.

"Social Statics" was well received, and Spencer suddenly found himself an established figure. He came to know the most important progressive thinkers in England, including John Stuart Mill, who had a strong influence on his thought; George Eliot, who introduced him to the positivism of Auguste Comte; and George Henry Lewes, who published his work in *The Leader.* It was with George Eliot that Spencer acted out the one love affair of his life. He was never comfortable with the idea that the relationship might go anywhere, however, and Francis and other commentators seem satisfied that he died a virgin. Eliot herself was infatuated, but complained of the "tremendous glacier" within him. When, apparently, he made clear to her the limits of his commitment, she tried her best to fit in: "I can promise you such companionship as there is in me, untroubled by painful emotions." But the glacier remained unmelted, and Spencer introduced Eliot to Lewes, who succeeded him as her partner. The connection between Spencer and Eliot was well known, but he was coy about it in the otherwise frank "Autobiography." When, in later life, Spencer was asked about the relationship, he reportedly explained that he broke it off because he thought that her nose was too long. The explanation seems to hide more than it gives away, but it's true that in Spencer's scheme of values the superficial was profound. In an 1854 essay on aesthetics, he declared, "The saying that beauty is but skin-deep, is but a skin-deep saying."

Spencer took a similar view of other apparently superficial things, such as coats, hats, and the manners of everyday life. For him, these were visible signals of who one was and how one stood vis-à-vis social authority. Just as his father had refused to address men as anything other than "Mr.," Spencer balked at wearing the insignia of aristocratic or bourgeois supremacy. Francis notes that "he saw top hats as the black cylinders that symbolized tyranny, and in deposing the one you toppled the other." (This aversion to top hats was famous, although a caricature of Spencer in *Vanity Fair* in 1879 mischievously depicted him wearing one.) He disliked formal wear and declined public invitations that involved putting on the garments of oppression. At first, Spencer showed up at dinners in a frock coat, only reluctantly making the transition to a swallowtail, but, as an amanuensis recorded, "he always refused to wear a white necktie": "Those who had invited him, he said, must take him as he chose to come." In 1874, Spencer turned down an invitation from the Foreign Secretary to a reception for Emperor Alexander II of Russia, excusing himself from the sartorial formality in the formal third person: "The necessity of wearing a levee dress, to which Mr. Spencer has an insuperable objection, compels him to decline the offered pleasure." (The Countess of Derby, the wife of his host, said that he could come dressed as he liked, but then Spencer begged off on the ground that he would stand out.)

Spencer became famous for this kind of behavior. When travelling by train, he would arrive with whatever manuscript he was currently working on tethered to his waist by two or three yards of thick string issuing from beneath his coat. Visible eccentricity was a sign of individuality; individuality was a core value, and Spencer happily drew attention to how he *lived* his philosophy. It was probably his studied intention to be an eccentric, yet, at the same time, there was a fine line between his antic behavior and the neuroses, panic attacks, and depressions to which he was prey. In 1856, soon after the publication of "The Principles of Psychology," he suffered a nervous breakdown, some of whose effects remained with him for the rest of his life. Even decades later, there seem to have been long periods when depression made work impossible, and he endured recurrent bouts of insomnia. Spencer saw his problem as one of "cerebral circulation," and he adopted various remedies to deal with the problem: diet (he experimented briefly with vegetarianism); smoking (which he considered good for his condition); taking opiates (in moderation); and a curious nighttime ritual in which he soaked his head in brine and then put two layers of headgear over the wet hair. In the nineteen-thirties, Dame Edith Sitwell placed Spencer in the pantheon of English eccentrics:

> The taking of Mr Spencer's pulse was one of the great ceremonies of the day, and often, when out driving in his victoria, a cry of "Stop" would be heard by the coachman, and then, no matter where the equipage might find itself, in the middle of busiest traffic, in Piccadilly, or in Regent Street, the carriage would stop dead, disrupting the traffic in question; and silence would reign for some seconds, whilst Mr Spencer consulted the dictates of his pulse. If the oracle proved favourable, the drive was continued; if not, Mr Spencer was driven home.



Spencer's "Autobiography" dwelt expansively on his poor nervous health, and also on the lessons supposedly learned from the breakdown, among them a number of scientific arguments in favor of amusement. Throughout his life, Spencer enjoyed relaxations ranging from salmon fishing to billiards, from tennis to concerts. He was aware that people thought philosophers shouldn't do things like play billiards or give picnics, and professed himself delighted to confound expectations. Commending billiards as a form of relaxation to Lewes and Eliot, Spencer shared with them "the maxim on which I have acted, and the maxim which I have often commended to my friends": "Be a boy as long as you can." But it was all more than a bit labored. Gaiety did not come easily to him, and he urged judicious relaxation on others not as something spontaneous one just did but as a theoretically justified discipline.

Similarly, despite the enjoyment he got from paying attention to superficial matters, there wasn't much place for irony in the Spencerian universe. Sincerity was the virtue that Spencer set greatest store by: "Let every one insist on reality and sincerity, and refrain as much as he can from complimentary usages which involve untruths. If each resolves to tell as few tacit lies as possible, social intercourse will be much healthier." The fact that he lived his philosophy so thoroughly was itself a show of sincerity, as was his account of himself in the "Autobiography." Even though its confessional mode often went against the Victorian grain, its underlying seriousness was quintessentially Victorian. For Spencer, the importance of being earnest could not be underestimated; the truth was all that mattered. Science, and a scientific approach to all the problems of social life, was another mode of sincerity, and the more science there was, the more moral people would be:

> What knowledge is of most worth?—the uniform reply is—Science. This is the verdict on all the counts. . . . Alike for the most perfect production and highest enjoyment of art in all its forms, the needful preparation is still—Science. And for purposes of discipline—intellectual, moral, religious—the most efficient study is, once more—Science.

Science could not only allow one to understand, predict, and control; it was all one needed to do the right thing, to be a good person.

It was Spencer's misfortune to outlive his reputation. His hypochondria notwithstanding, he lived to eighty-three. In the eighteen-nineties, his longtime friend Beatrice Webb formed the opinion that Spencer was quite vigorous for a man in his seventies. In 1903, the year of Spencer's death, the moral philosopher G. E. Moore identified what he called "the naturalistic fallacy"—the logical impossibility of inferring that something is good from a proposition about its natural properties. Spencer had spent most of his career doing precisely this, and Moore wrote, "There can be no doubt that Mr. Spencer has committed the naturalistic fallacy." Spencer might have argued that since the moral domain was itself a natural phenomenon there was no fallacy at all. Still, Moore had identified a crucial difference between the concept of evolution propounded by Spencer and that proposed by Darwin. For Darwin, evolution was directionless and morally neutral, but for Spencer evolution was *going somewhere;* natural change was progressive, and it was good. Progress, Spencer wrote (eight years before Darwin published "On the Origin of Species"), was "not an accident, but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artificial, it is a part of nature; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower." Darwin's evolutionary writings had immense scientific authority, and they sought to be morally and politically neutral. By contrast, Spencer delivered the moral and political goods to people who believed, or wanted to believe, that they were nature's fittest and would be the survivors—not through the exercise of naked power but through the inevitable workings of natural law. However, the big idea that gave Spencer's philosophy its coherence was just too big to yield coherence or pertinence at more mundane levels. Watching Spencer derive concrete social policies from his theory of evolution is like trying to deduce whether to send the kids to private school from a theory of justice. The sledgehammer cracks the nut, but it makes a mess.

In November of 1882, *two* British literary lions were prowling New York. One was Spencer, and the other was the twenty-eight-year-old Oscar Wilde, who was then at the end of a year-long speaking tour of America, having been invited by Richard D'Oyly Carte to promote the new Aesthetic Movement. There is no evidence that they met, but Spencer knew who Wilde was and recognized a rival in the coming culture wars between science and art. American newspapers reported that Spencer called Wilde "an outlandish person who attempts to reconcile idiocy with art." Spencer subsequently denied saying it, but Wilde bided his time. In 1891, he published "The Decay of Lying," a celebration of insincerity in a culture that was becoming less convinced that truth really did settle matters of morals or of beauty. Science told the truth about the world; art made its own worlds. Who would you prefer, Wilde asked—the truth-telling scientific philosopher or the delight-giving liar? Go for the liar every time:

> Nor will he be welcomed by society alone. Art, breaking from the prisonhouse of realism, will run to greet him, and will kiss his false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone is in possession of the great secret of all her manifestations, the secret that Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style; while Life—poor, probable, uninteresting human life—tired of repeating herself for the benefit of Mr. Herbert Spencer, scientific historians, and the compilers of statistics in general, will follow meekly after him, and try to reproduce, in her own simple and untutored way, some of the marvels of which he talks. ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

From the Chicago Tribune.

So now what we are dealing with is the rubber meeting the road, and instead of biting the bullet on these issues, we just want to punt.

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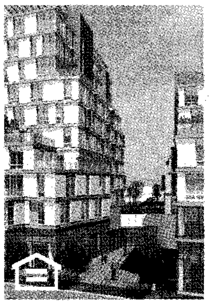
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EXIT WOUNDS

The legacy of Indian partition.

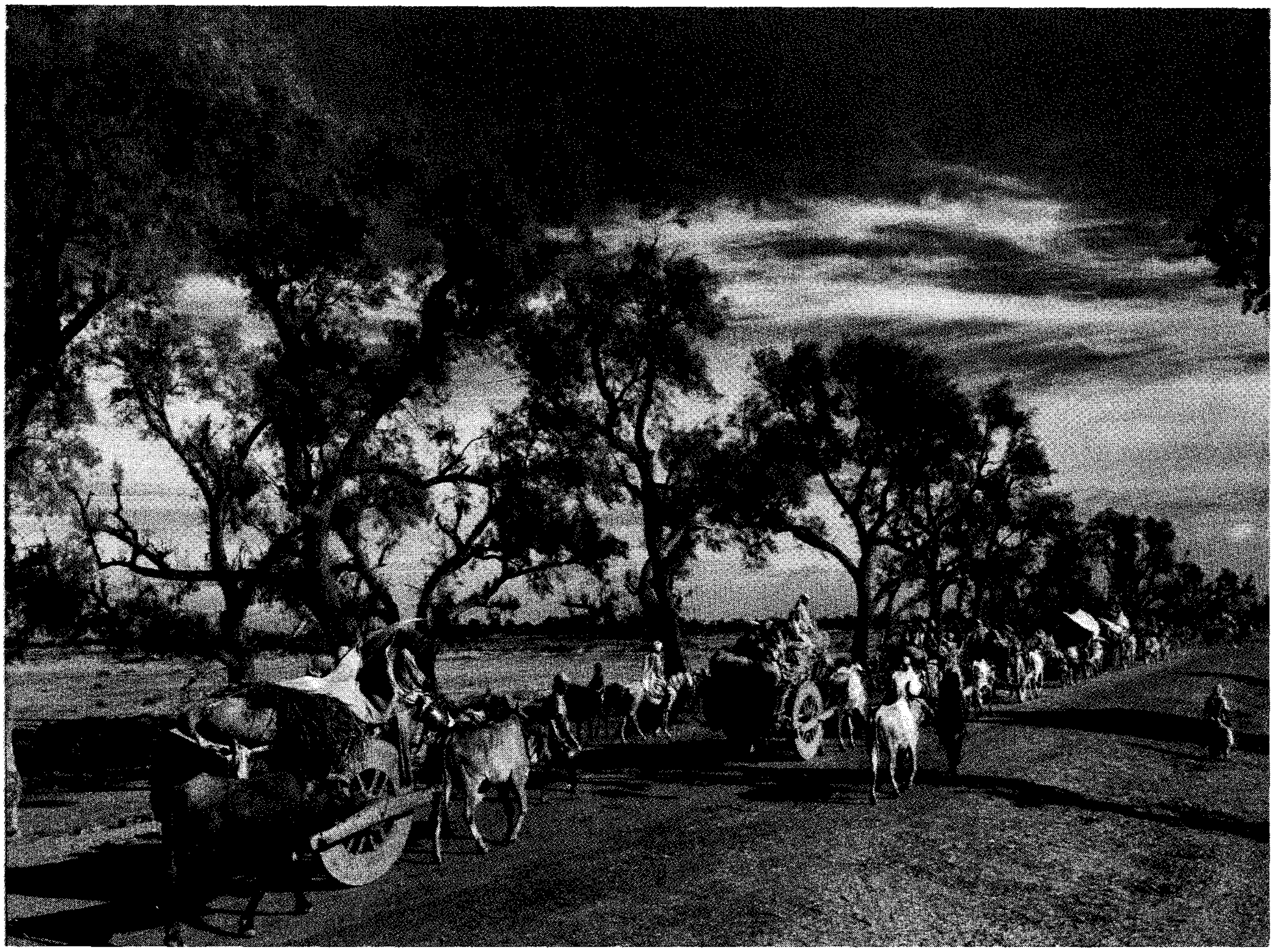
BY PANKAJ MISHRA

Sixty years ago, on the evening of August 14, 1947, a few hours before Britain's Indian Empire was formally divided into the nation-states of India and Pakistan, Lord Louis Mountbatten and his wife, Edwina, sat down in the viceregal mansion in New Delhi to watch the latest Bob Hope movie, "My Favorite Brunette." Large parts of the subcontinent were descending into chaos, as the implications of partitioning the Indian Empire along religious lines became clear to the millions of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs caught on the wrong side of the border. In the next few months, some twelve million people would be uprooted and as many as a million murdered. But on that night in mid-August the bloodbath—and the fuller consequences of hasty imperial retreat—still lay in the future, and the Mountbattens probably felt they had earned their evening's entertainment.

Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India, had arrived in New Delhi in March, 1947, charged with an almost impossible task. Irrevocably enfeebled by the Second World War, the British belatedly realized that they had to leave the subcontinent, which had spiralled out of their control through the nineteen-forties. But plans for brisk disengagement ignored messy realities on the ground. Mountbatten had a clear remit to transfer power to the Indians within fifteen months. Leaving India to God, or anarchy, as Mohandas Gandhi, the foremost Indian leader, exhorted, wasn't a political option, however tempting. Mountbatten had to work hard to figure out how and to whom power was to be transferred.

The dominant political party, the Congress Party, took inspiration from Gandhi in claiming to be a secular organization, representing all four hundred million Indians. But many Muslim politicians saw it as a party of upper-caste Hindus and demanded a separate homeland for their hundred million co-religionists, who were intermingled with non-Muslim populations across the subcontinent's villages, towns, and cities. Eventually, as in Palestine, the British saw partition along religious lines as the quickest way to the exit.

But sectarian riots in Punjab and Bengal dimmed hopes for a quick and dignified British withdrawal, and boded ill for India's assumption of power. Not sur-



A convoy of Sikhs migrating to East Punjab in October, 1947. Photograph by Margaret Bourke-White.

prisingly, there were some notable absences at the Independence Day celebrations in New Delhi on August 15th. Gandhi, denouncing freedom from imperial rule as a "wooden loaf," had remained in Calcutta, trying, with the force of his moral authority, to stop Hindus and Muslims from killing each other. His great rival Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who had fought bitterly for a separate homeland for Indian Muslims, was in Karachi, trying to hold together the precarious nation-state of Pakistan.

Nevertheless, the significance of the occasion was not lost on many. While the Mountbattens were sitting down to their Bob Hope movie, India's constituent assembly was convening in New Delhi. The moment demanded grandiloquence, and Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi's closest disciple and soon to be India's first Prime Minister, provided it. "Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny," he said. "At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awaken to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance."

Posterity has enshrined this speech, as Nehru clearly intended. But today his quaint phrase "tryst with destiny" resonates ominously, so enduring have been the political and psychological scars of partition. The souls of the two new nation-states immediately found utterance in brutal enmity. In Punjab, armed vigilante groups, organized along religious lines and incited by local politicians, murdered countless people, abducting and raping thousands of women. Soon, India and Pakistan were fighting a war—the first of three—over the disputed territory of Kashmir. Gandhi, reduced to despair by the seemingly endless cycle of retaliatory mass murders and displacement, was shot dead in January, 1948, by a Hindu extremist who believed that the father of the Indian nation was too soft on Muslims. Jinnah, racked with tuberculosis and overwork, died a few months later, his dream of a secular Pakistan apparently buried with him.

GETTY IMAGES

Many of the seeds of postcolonial disorder in South Asia were sown much earlier, in two centuries of direct and indirect British rule, but, as book after book has demonstrated, nothing in the complex tragedy of partition was inevitable. In "Indian Summer" (Henry Holt; $30), Alex von Tunzelmann pays particular attention to how negotiations were shaped by an interplay of personalities. Von Tunzelmann goes on a bit too much about the Mountbattens' open marriage and their connections to various British royals, toffs, and fops, but her account, unlike those of some of her fellow British historians, isn't filtered by nostalgia. She summarizes bluntly the economic record of the British overlords, who, though never as rapacious and destructive as the Belgians in the Congo, damaged agriculture and retarded industrial growth in India through a blind faith in the "invisible hand" that supposedly regulated markets. Von Tunzelmann echoes Edmund Burke's denunciation of the East India Company when she terms the empire's corporate forerunner a "beast" whose "only object was money"; and she reminds readers that, in 1877, the year that Queen Victoria officially became Empress of India, a famine in the south killed five million people even as the Queen's viceroy remained adamant that famine relief was a misguided policy.

Politically, too, British rule in India was deeply conservative, limiting Indian access to higher education, industry, and the civil service. Writing in the New York *Tribune* in the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx predicted that British colonials would prove to be the "unconscious tool" of a "social revolution" in a subcontinent stagnating under "Oriental despotism." As it turned out, the British, while restricting an educated middle class, empowered a multitude of petty Oriental despots. (In 1947, there were five hundred and sixty-five of these feudatories, often called maharajas, running states as large as Belgium and as small as Central Park.)

Though blessed with many able administrators, the British found India just too large and diverse to handle. Many of their decisions stoked Hindu-Muslim tensions, imposing sharp new religious-political identities on Indians. As the recent experience of Iraq proves, elections in a country where the rights and responsibilities of secular and democratic citizenship are largely unknown do little more than crudely assert the majority's right to rule. British-supervised elections in 1937 and 1946, which the Hindu-dominated Congress won easily, only hardened Muslim identity, and made partition inevitable.

This was a deeper tragedy than is commonly realized—and not only because India today has almost as many Muslims as Pakistan. In a land where cultures, traditions, and beliefs cut across religious communities, few people had defined themselves exclusively through their ancestral faith. The Pashto-speaking Muslim in the North-West Frontier province (later the nursery of the Taliban and Al Qaeda) had little in common with the Bangla-speaking Muslim in the eastern province of Bengal. (Even today, a Sunni Muslim from Lahore has less in common with a Sunni Muslim from Dhaka than he has with a Hindu Brahmin from New Delhi, who, in turn, may find alien the language, food, and dress of a low-caste Hindu from Chennai.) The British policy of defining communities based on religious identity radically altered Indian self-perceptions, as von Tunzelmann points out: "Many Indians stopped accepting the diversity of their own thoughts and began to ask themselves in which of the boxes they belonged."

Ineptitude and negligence directed British policies in India more than any cynical desire to divide and rule, but the British were not above exploiting rivalries. As late as 1940, Winston Churchill hoped that Hindu-Muslim antagonism would remain "a bulwark of British rule in India." Certainly Churchill, who did not want his views on India to be "disturbed by any bloody Indians," was disinclined to recognize the upsurge of nationalism in India. Imperial authority in India rested on the claim that the British, as representatives of a superior civilization, were essentially benign custodians of a fractious country. But as an Indian middle-class élite trained in Western institutions became politicized—more aware of the nature and scale of Indian political and economic subjugation to Britain—self-serving British rhetoric about benevolent masters and volatile natives was bound to be challenged. And no one undermined British assumptions of moral and legal custodianship better than Gandhi, who was adept both at galvanizing the Indian masses and at alerting the British to the gap between their high claims and the reality of their rule. With a series of imaginative, often carefully choreographed campaigns of civil disobedience throughout the nineteen-twenties, Gandhi shook the confidence of the British, becoming, by 1931, as India's viceroy Lord Willingdon put it in a letter to King George V, a "terribly difficult little person." Once such middle-class nationalists as Gandhi and Nehru acquired a popular following, independence was only a matter of time. If anything, Gandhi's doctrine of nonviolence probably reduced the threat that a nationwide uprising would force an early and bloody exit for the British.

Through the nineteen-thirties, Gandhi had a few perceptive and sympathetic British interlocutors, such as the viceroy Lord Irwin, who when asked if he thought Gandhi was tiresome retorted, "Some people thought Our Lord very tiresome." For the most part, though, Gandhi dealt with such hidebound members of Britain's landowning class as Lord Linlithgow, who, as viceroy of India in the crucial period from 1936 to 1943, liked to be accompanied into dinner every evening by a band playing "The Roast Beef of Old England"—a tactless choice of preprandial music in the land of the holy cow. In 1939, without consulting any Indian leaders, Linlithgow declared war on Germany on behalf of India, committing two and a half million Indian soldiers to the Allied cause. Convinced that independence for India was many decades away, he found an equally obdurate ally in London once Churchill came to power, in 1940.

In the nineteen-twenties and thirties, Churchill had been loudest among the reactionaries who were determined not to lose India, "the jewel in the crown," and, as Prime Minister during the Second World War, he tried every tactic to thwart Indian independence. "I hate Indians," he declared. "They are a beastly people with a beastly religion." He had a special animus for Gandhi, describing him as a "rascal" and a "half-naked" "fakir." (In a letter to Churchill, Gandhi took the latter as a compliment, claiming that he was striving for even greater renunciation.) According to his own Secretary of State for India, Leopold Amery, Churchill knew "as much of the Indian problem as George III did of the American colonies."

In 1942, as the Japanese Army advanced on India, the Congress Party was willing to offer war support in return for immediate self-government. But Churchill was in no mood to negotiate. Frustrated by his stonewalling tactics, the Congress Party launched a vigorous "Quit India" campaign in August of 1942. The British suppressed it ruthlessly, imprisoning tens of thousands, including Gandhi and Nehru. Meanwhile, Churchill's indispensable quartermaster Franklin D. Roosevelt was aware of the contradiction in claiming to fight for freedom and democracy while keeping India under foreign occupation. In letters and telegrams, he continually urged Churchill to move India toward self-government, only to receive replies that waffled and prevaricated. Muslims, Churchill once claimed, made up seventy-five per cent of the Indian Army (the actual figure was close to thirty-five), and none of them wanted to be ruled by the "Hindu priesthood."

Von Tunzelmann judges that Churchill, hoping to forestall independence by opportunistically supporting Muslim separatism, instead became "instrumental in creating the world's first modern Islamic state." This is a bit unfair—not to Churchill but to Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Though always keen to incite Muslim disaffection in his last years, the Anglicized, whiskey-drinking Jinnah was far from being an Islamic theocrat; he wanted a secular Pakistan, in which Muslims, Hindus, and Christians were equal before the law. (In fact, political Islam found only intermittent support within Pakistan until the nineteen-eighties, when the country's military dictator, working with the Saudis and the C.I.A., turned the North-West Frontier province into the base of a global jihad against the Soviet occupation of neighboring Afghanistan.)

What Leopold Amery denounced as Churchill's "Hitler-like attitude" to India manifested itself most starkly during a famine, caused by a combination of war and mismanagement, that claimed between one and two million lives in Bengal in 1943. Urgently beseeched by Amery and the Indian viceroy to release food stocks for India, Churchill responded with a telegram asking why Gandhi hadn't died yet.

"It is strange," George Orwell wrote in his diary in August, 1942, "but quite truly the way the British government is now behaving in India upsets me more than a military defeat." Orwell, who produced many BBC broadcasts from London to India during the war, feared that "if these repressive measures in India are seemingly successful, the effects in this country will be very bad. All seems set for a big comeback by the reactionaries." But in the British elections at the end of the war, the reactionaries unexpectedly lost to the Labour Party, and a new era in British politics began.

As von Tunzelmann writes, "By 1946, the subcontinent was a mess, with British civil and military officers desperate to leave, and a growing hostility to their presence among Indians." In an authoritative recent two-volume account of the end of the British Empire in Asia—"Forgotten Armies" and "Forgotten Wars"—the Cambridge University historians Tim Harper and Christopher Bayly describe how quickly the Japanese had humiliated the British in Malaya and Burma, threatening their hold over India. With their mystique of power gone, Asia's British masters depended on what Bayly and Harper term the "temporary sufferance of Asians." Although Churchill had rejected the Congress Party's offer of military support in exchange for independence, Bayley and Harper write that, ultimately, "it was Indian soldiers, civilian laborers and businessmen who made possible the victory of 1945. Their price was the rapid independence of India."

The British could not now rely on brute force without imperilling their own sense of legitimacy. Besides, however much they "preferred the illusion of imperial might to the admission of imperial failure," as von Tunzelmann puts it, the country, deep in wartime debt, simply couldn't afford to hold on to its increasingly unstable empire. Imperial disengagement appeared not just inevitable but urgent.

But Churchill's divisive policies had

already produced a disastrous effect on the Indian political scene. Congress Party leaders had refused to share power with Jinnah, confident that they did not need Muslim support in order to win a majority vote in elections. These attitudes stoked Muslim fears that the secular nationalism of Gandhi and Nehru was a cover for Hindu dominance. While the Congress leaders were in prison, Jinnah, with Churchill's encouragement, steadily consolidated Muslim opinion behind him. By 1946, this secularist politician had managed to present himself as the best defender of Muslim interests in a Hindu-dominated India. Religion was never so deeply and enduringly politicized in India as it was in the last years of imperial rule.

At first, Nehru and other Congress Party leaders dismissed the idea of Pakistan as a joke. Jinnah demonstrated his newfound power by ordering mass strikes across India, many of which degenerated into Hindu-Muslim riots. In just three days in August, 1946, four thousand residents of Calcutta died. Retaliatory killings around the country further envenomed political attitudes. A heartbroken Gandhi found fewer and fewer takers for nonviolence, even among his Congress Party, many of whose leaders spoke openly of civil war.

When the improbably handsome Mountbatten arrived, in March of 1947, with his rich and beautiful wife, he did not initially seem up to the task of supervising British withdrawal and giving a viable postcolonial shape to the subcontinent. Not everyone had been impressed by his elevation, in 1943, to the post of the supreme commander of the Allied Forces in South-East Asia. His American deputy, General Joseph Stilwell, concluded, "The Glamour Boy is just that. Enormous staff, endless walla-walla, but damned little fighting." It was probably just as well that Mountbatten did little fighting. Early in the war, he had sailed the destroyer H.M.S. Kelly into a minefield before ramming it into another British ship. After exposing his ship to German torpedo fire ("That's going to kill an awful lot of chaps," he recalled thinking as he saw the metal streaking toward him), Mountbatten finally saw it sunk by German dive-bombers off the coast of Crete.

Known in the British Admiralty as the Master of Disaster, Mountbatten nonetheless displayed astonishing political maturity as the war ended in the Asian countries under his command. He realized that prolonged Japanese occupation of Malaya, Burma, Indonesia, and Indochina had unleashed nationalistic aspirations that exhausted European empires would not be able to suppress. He advised the French that war with the Viet Minh, who had declared an independent Vietnam soon after the Japanese surrender, was pointless, and he even supported an ambitious plan by the British Labour politician Tom Driberg to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh. He had little sympathy for the efforts of the Dutch to reassert their authority in Indonesia, and in Burma he

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infuriated the old imperialist guard by promoting the nationalist radical Aung San (the father of the long-imprisoned activist Aung San Suu Kyi).

The awesome task Mountbatten faced in India may have appealed to his ego. Though he knew little of the intricacies of Indian politics, he deployed a great deal of personal charm; and he had an effective ally in his estranged wife, Edwina. Together, this "power couple" went to work on Indian leaders. Gandhi succumbed, as did the Anglophilic Nehru, who grew particularly close to Edwina. Jinnah, however, remained difficult to please.

New problems arose every day. British concessions to Muslim separatism emboldened other religious and ethnic minorities. The fiercely tribalist Pashtuns of the North-West Frontier province, wary of Jinnah, asked for Pathanistan; the Naga tribes in the northeastern hills, who had been armed by the British to fight the Japanese, demanded Nagastan; the Sikhs proposed Sikhistan; the Baluchis went ahead and declared an independent Baluchistan. Mountbatten defused most of these would-be secessionists with a mixture of sweet-talking and bluster. His aristocratic connections came in particularly handy as he placated maharajas who were abruptly forced to choose between India and Pakistan. The trickiest of them, the Hindu ruler of Kashmir, who presided over a Muslim-majority population, was later to accede to India in circumstances that remain controversial and have preserved Pakistan's claims on the state.

Eventually, after wrangling and recriminations, Mountbatten got Indian leaders to agree to partition. Then, abruptly, in early June, he announced August 15, 1947, as the date for the transfer of power, bringing forward the British government's original schedule by nine months. The reason for this rush is not known. Mountbatten may have wanted to inject some urgency into the tortuous negotiations about who would get what—even ink pots were to be divided between the new nation-states. He may also have simply wanted to cut and run. In any case, his decision is partly to blame for the disasters that followed.

Cyril Radcliffe, a London barrister, was flown to Delhi and given forty days to define precisely the strange political geography of an India flanked by an eastern and a western wing called Pakistan. He did not visit the villages, communities, rivers, or forests divided by the lines he drew on paper. Ill-informed about the relation between agricultural hinterlands and industrial centers, he made a mistake of enormous economic consequence when, dividing Bengal on religious lines, he deprived the Muslim majority in the eastern region of its major city, Calcutta, condemning East Pakistan—and, later, Bangladesh—to decades of rural backwardness.

It was in Punjab that Radcliffe's map-making sparked the biggest conflagration. As Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs on either side of the new border suddenly found themselves reduced to a religious minority, the tensions of the preceding months exploded into the violence of ethnic cleansing. It seems extraordinary today that so few among the cabal of Indian leaders whom Mountbatten consulted anticipated that the drawing of borders and the crystallizing of national identities along religious lines would plunge millions into bewilderment, panic, and murderous rage. If the British were eager to divide and quit, their successors wanted to savor power. No one had prepared for a massive transfer of population. Even as armed militias roamed the countryside, looking for people to kidnap, rape, and kill, houses to loot, and trains to derail and burn, the only force capable of restoring order, the British Indian Army, was itself being divided along religious lines—Muslim soldiers to Pakistan, Hindus to India. Soon, many of the communalized soldiers would join their co-religionists in killing sprees, giving the violence of partition its genocidal cast. Radcliffe never returned to India. Just before his death, in 1977, he told a journalist, "I suspect they'd shoot me out of hand—both sides."

Trains carrying nothing but corpses through a desolate countryside became the totemic image of the savagery of partition. British soldiers confined to their barracks, ordered by Mountbatten to save only British lives, may prove to be the most enduring image of imperial retreat. With this act of moral dereliction, the British Empire finally disowned its noble sense of mission. As Paul Scott put it in "The Raj Quartet," the epic of imperial exhaustion and disillusion, India in 1947 was where the empire's high idea of itself collapsed and "the British came to the end of themselves as they were."

The British Empire passed quickly and with less humiliation than its French and Dutch counterparts, but decades later the vicious politics of partition still seems to define India and Pakistan. The millions of Muslims who chose to stay in India never ceased to be hostages to Hindu extremists. As recently as 2002, Hindu nationalists massacred more than two thousand Muslims in the state of Gujarat. The dispute over Kashmir, the biggest unfinished business of partition, committed countries with mostly poor and illiterate populations to a nuclear arms race and nourished extremists in both countries: Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan, Hindu nationalists in India. It also damaged India's fragile democracy—Indian soldiers and policemen in Kashmir routinely execute and torture Pakistan-backed Muslim insurgents—and helped cement the military's extra-constitutional influence over Pakistan's inherently weaker state. Tens of thousands have died in Kashmir in the past decade and a half, and since 1947 sectarian conflicts in India and Pakistan have killed thousands more.

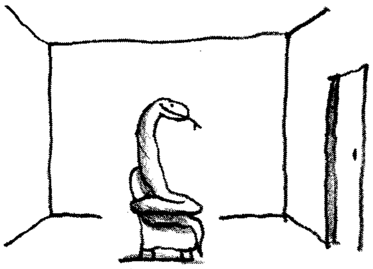
Many ethnic minorities chafed at the postcolonial nationalism of India and Pakistan, and some rebelled. At least one group—Bengali Muslims—succeeded in establishing their own nation-state (Bangladesh), though only after suffering another round of ethnic cleansing, this time by fellow-Muslims. Other minorities demanding political autonomy—Nagas, Sikhs, Kashmiris, Baluchis—were quelled, often with greater brutality than the British had ever used against their subjects.

Meeting Mountbatten a few months after partition, Churchill assailed him for helping Britain's "enemies," "Hindustan," against "Britain's friends," the Muslims. Little did Churchill know that his expedient boosting of political Islam would eventually unleash a global jihad engulfing even distant New York and London. The rival nationalisms and politicized religions the British Empire brought into being now clash in an enlarged geopolitical arena; and the human costs of imperial overreaching seem unlikely to attain a final tally for many more decades. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Strawberry Fields, *by Marina Lewycka (Penguin Press; $24.95).* This affectionate follow-up to Lewycka's début novel (about a Ukrainian family assimilating to contemporary Britain) plays out similar themes of immigrant struggle on a broader scale. A cast of itinerant characters realize that picking strawberries in Kent is more lucrative than white-collar jobs in their homelands, and narrate their journeys in the spirit of Chaucer's pilgrims. Among them are a domineering Polish woman and her mild-mannered niece; a seventeen-year-old Malawian whose innocence is in inverse proportion to the tragedies of his past; two giggly but intellectual Chinese girls; and a pair of antagonistic Ukrainians (she the educated daughter of a professor, he the pragmatic son of a miner). Lewycka's stylistic quirks can sometimes fall flat—a dog with Disney-like abilities to rescue characters gets a recurrent speaking role—but the jostle of voices creates an effervescent comedy, beneath which lies a more sombre look at the costs of globalization.

The Great Man, *by Kate Christensen (Doubleday; $23.95).* At the center of this snippy comedy of manners is a New York-based painter and philanderer, Oscar Feldman, whose œuvre consists of boldly rendered female nudes. That Oscar has been dead for a few years barely matters to the constellation of elderly women in his orbit: his long-suffering wife, Abigail, who rarely leaves her Upper West Side apartment; Teddy, his soignée bohemian mistress, moldering in Greenpoint; his sister Maxine, an abstract painter who is equally preoccupied with female flesh, and considered by some a greater talent. When two feckless biographers descend, looking for the inside scoop, Oscar's big secret, hanging in plain view, becomes a vehicle for both rapprochement and revelation. Christensen addresses topics like gender and race with overly broad strokes, but her picture of three women coping with the indignities and the pleasures of old age is satisfyingly detailed.



Walled, *by Sylvain Cypel (Other Press; $17.95).* In this survey of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (translated anonymously from the French), Cypel, an editor at *Le Monde* who spent twelve years in Israel, writes with the ardor of a believer and the critical eye of a distant observer, producing a nuanced assault on the blindness and inertia that have afflicted both sides. Cypel is a harsh critic of the failures of Palestinian leadership—he excoriates the "Oriental despot" Arafat and the "impotent" regime he built—but believes that Israel needs to be saved from its own incipient brutalization. This process, which he carefully documents, is marked by a "cult of force," a denial of history, an obsession with security at the expense of human rights, and a shocking willingness to discuss, publicly, the forcible cleansing of Palestinians from Israeli territory. These are symptoms of occupation, Cypel argues, and they can be cured only by its end.

The World Without Us, *by Alan Weisman (St. Martin's; $24.95).* Teasing out the consequences of a simple thought experiment—what would happen if the human species were suddenly extinguished—Weisman has written a sort of pop-science ghost story, in which the whole earth is the haunted house. Among the highlights: with pumps not working, the New York City subways would fill with water within days, while weeds and then trees would retake the buckled streets and wild predators would ravage the domesticated dogs. Texas's unattended petrochemical complexes might ignite, scattering hydrogen cyanide to the winds—a "mini chemical nuclear winter." After thousands of years, the Chunnel, rubber tires, and more than a billion tons of plastic might remain, but eventually a polymer-eating microbe could evolve, and, with the spectacular return of fish and bird populations, the earth might revert to Eden.

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ON TELEVISION

WOMEN'S WORK

Sunday night on Lifetime.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

On Lifetime, the channel that branded itself as "television for women," danger and looming death seem to be the unifying concept of the programming. In any given few days, you'll see shows such as those which were described in my on-screen TV guide last week: "After his daughter kills his wife, a California con man weds his wife's sister"; "A deranged gunman kidnaps two teen-age girls"; "Orphaned siblings fall victim to a mentally unstable woman and her husband"; "An assistant district attorney hounds an Oregon woman he suspects has shot her three children"; and "An attorney faces charges of murdering his ex-lover." What you learn from watching Lifetime is: Don't go in the house; don't leave the house; don't let your daughter leave the house; and, whatever you do, don't let that man in the house. There is often more to the shows and movies on Lifetime than you might guess from the descriptions, but for many people the channel is still a puzzlement at best; its slogan might as well be "Television for women who aren't like any women you've ever met in your life."

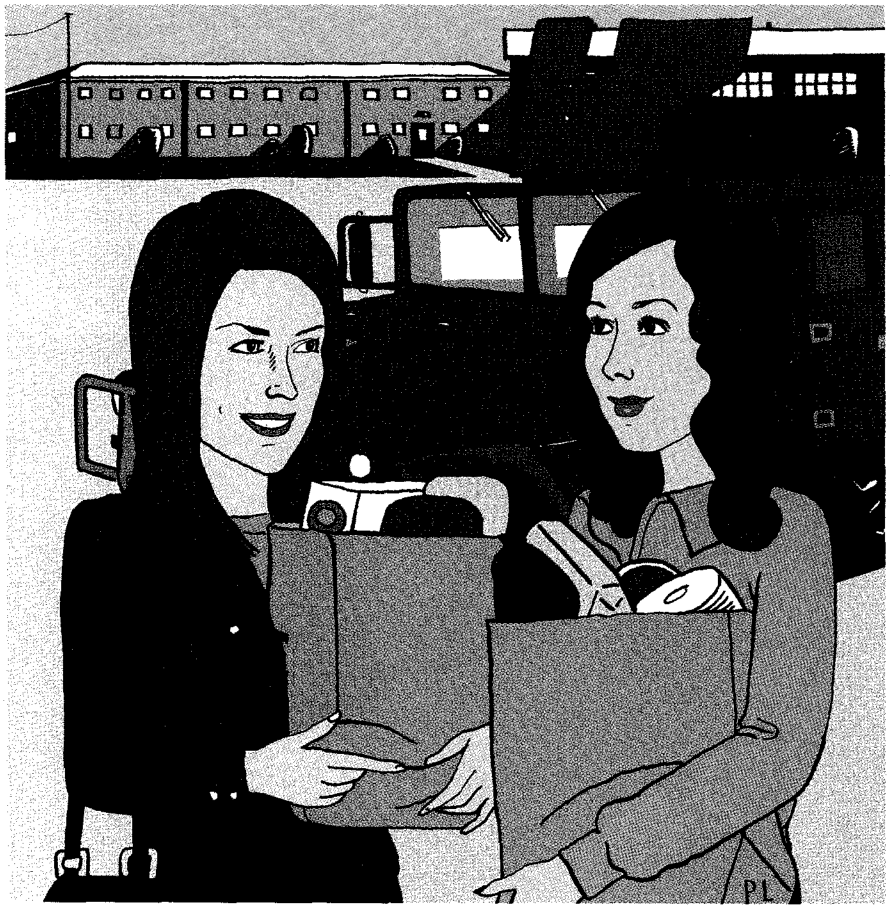
Tell me that Lifetime had a miniseries two years ago about the important subject of human trafficking and that it participates in efforts to end domestic abuse, and I'll tell you that it has a reality show called "Gay, Straight, or Taken," in which women looking for a date try to guess which of their suitors is which, and that the channel's Web site offers you the chance to win a trip to Beverly Hills to have lunch with Jackie Collins or a free reading with a psychic or a thousand dollars, if you happen to look like a celebrity. Of course, a niche channel's job isn't to appeal to everyone; it's to be as obviously niche-y as possible, in order to appeal, with relentless specificity, to particular advertisers. Lifetime has always gone after a demographic that is largely ignored—no, actively shunned—by other networks: older women. But, aside from the fear-and-loathing programming, there isn't much to choose from on the depressing and often ridiculous menu of offerings. It's an endless loop of victimization followed by empowerment, interlarded with syndicated sitcoms like the third-rate "Still Standing" and "Reba." It's an odd thing to say about a channel that's for women, but Lifetime somehow just isn't very grown up. As a lobbying force, it may stride briskly through the corridors of power; on an artistic level, it bounces along on My Little Pony.

Now Lifetime has hit the jillpot with the Sunday-night drama "Army Wives," which débuted two months ago and right away became the biggest hit the channel has ever had. A month later, two more new series, "Side Order of Life" and "State of Mind"—both of them lame comedic dramas, or, if you prefer, lame dramatic comedies—débuted in the setup slots on Sunday, giving Lifetime the distinction of being the only channel with a whole night of new shows this summer. With these series, Lifetime joins the big boys in making an avowed effort to dump older women. "My mandate is to bring down the median age of Lifetime," Susanne Daniels, the president of the channel's entertainment division, said after the first-night ratings triumph of "Army Wives." You go, girlfriend—you go on out there and proudly bring mediocre drama to a new generation of women!

"Army Wives" shares an executive producer with "Grey's Anatomy," and that connection has been pushed heavily in promos. But the new show will remind viewers more of "Desperate Housewives" than of "Grey's"; there's the same uncomfortable mixture of drama, comedy, and satire, all—in the case of "Army Wives"—dipped in a big vat of sap. The sap is stickier for being fresh; the show is set in the present, on an Army base in the South, from which soldiers are regularly sent off to die and where the people left behind try to get through life as normally as they can. In the first episode, four wives and one husband—his wife is a lieutenant colonel, just back from two years in Afghanistan—who would not naturally form a group are thrown together in a bonding experience: one of the wives is expecting twins, and at a garden party her water breaks. With the assistance of the four others, she ends up giving birth on a pool table in a bar. That's the event that brings the five together, but earlier in the episode they are introduced to us individually, so that we get a sense of their personalities and where they stand in the pecking order, and also, as in a TV movie—where melodrama has to open and close in two hours, not including commercials—planting clues as to how our assumptions about these characters will be upended.

The first person we meet is Roxy (Sally Pressman)—actually, before we meet her face to face we meet her butt, walking through a bar. (It's as if the camera were showing us the way she's used to being seen.) Roxy works at the bar, and is that staple of popular entertainment a sassy Southern spitfire—"sassy" in capital letters, boldface, and with an exclamation point. (Pressman and her character happen to bear some resemblance to Kyra Sedgwick and the sassbag she plays in TNT's "The Closer.") A nice-looking soldier in uniform enters the bar and says, "I know I only met you four days ago, but I think you're my soul mate." It doesn't bother him one bit that she has two kids already, by two different fathers. Right away, wrapping up this one-minute version of "An Officer and a Gentleman," she agrees to marry him and move to his post. Next is Claudia Joy (Kim Delaney, of "NYPD Blue"), the serenely capable wife of one of the highest-ranking officers on the base—a distinction that gives her near-queenly ranking among the spouses. Roland (Sterling K. Brown) is a psychiatrist and a civilian; we first see him when he's on the tarmac waiting for his wife—and the trunkful of complications that will accompany her—to arrive home. Then, there's Pamela (Brigid Brannagh), who when we first meet her is getting an ultrasound; she is acting as a surrogate mother to make money for her family.

(The pilot and several other episodes were written by Katherine Fugate, who is also the series' creator; no male writer, I think it's safe to say, would introduce a character on a gynecologist's table, and then go further by having the character make a sexual joke about the ultrasound wand.) Denise (Catherine Bell, a veteran of nine years on "JAG") is in the middle of a family argument, or really a one-sided berating of her teen-age son, for no apparent reason, by her crew-cut husband, a major and a major bully. Denise has bruises on her arms; we know, or think we know, who put them there.



Sass, class, and brass: Kim Delaney and Catherine Bell in "Army Wives."

PATRICK LONG

There are stereotypes in "Army Wives," but how could there not be? Military life isn't about nuance or subtlety. Issues of class and rank are at work on an Army base, as they are anywhere, and the inevitable jealousy and gossip are what make this show "juicy." I use quotes because to me the juiciness seems so obviously manufactured, as it is in "Desperate Housewives." Something of value does come through the phoniness, though; there are plenty of pokes at the Army's rigidity and unfairness and at the compromises it exacts from everyone, high and low, and there's no backing off from the toll that the war has taken. Roland's wife, Joan (Wendy Davis), suffers from full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder, and her troubles, and their ongoing, not entirely predictable ramifications, are a large part of what drives the story. (Early in the first episode, a character refers to a "don't-kill-your-spouse questionnaire" that returning soldiers have to fill out. In 2002, four Army wives were killed by their spouses at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. "Army Wives" is based on a book, "Under the Sabers"—newly retitled "Army Wives"—by Tanya Biank, which grew out of Biank's coverage of the story for the Fayetteville *Observer*. Biank is an Army wife herself, and serves as an adviser to the series.) What's missing from the show is pointed politics of any kind. There is one instance of a teen-ager—Claudia Joy's daughter—being arrested at a peace rally, but that's merely a device through which everyone learns a lesson about family and understanding. "Army Wives" is very much in the Lifetime mold, which is to say that it doesn't live up to the Army slogan "Be all that you can be."

I wearily note, for the record, that both of the other Sunday-night series on Lifetime begin with dream sequences in which the lead characters—played by Lili Taylor in "State of Mind" and Marisa Coughlan in "Side Order of Life"—are humiliated in public. It's clear that it no longer makes sense to prosecute this crime of supposed cleverness; every TV writer would be in jail if Hollywood cracked down on dream sequences. But it's a shame that the ploy is resorted to so often; there are better ways to reveal what a character is struggling with. And, consarn it, "State of Mind" starts the second and third episodes the same way—a repeat offense for which there is really no excuse, not even the fact that the main character is a psychiatrist. Taylor's Dr. Ann Bellowes shares office space in an airy Victorian house in New Haven with several other shrinks, including her husband. In the first episode, she shows up at the wrong time for her own marriage-counselling appointment and finds her husband and the therapist having a fine old time. She throws him out of the house, of course, and out of the office, replacing him with a hapless young lawyer. (He is played by Devon Gummersall, who portrayed the memorably odd, awkward neighbor boy Brian in "My So-Called Life.")

In short order, "State of Mind" gets cute, and it stays there. (It was created by the writer Amy Bloom, who is also a psychotherapist. This is her first venture into TV; she is the show's head writer and one of the executive producers.) You'd think that Lili Taylor would be ideal as a therapist, because she comes across as "real," and doesn't look like a cable-news anchor, as so many women on TV do. But there's too much going on here—four colleagues in the building, a nutty receptionist, patients, the usual overbearing mother who comes to town out of the blue, and so on—and Taylor's character is scattered and irksome. The show panders up and down the lot: it caters to uninformed fantasies of how psychiatrists work, and it's not very smart about how relationships work, either. Yes, I'm hard on Lifetime, but that's because its failings call attention not to what it has but to what it lacks: balls. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

LOVER BEWARE

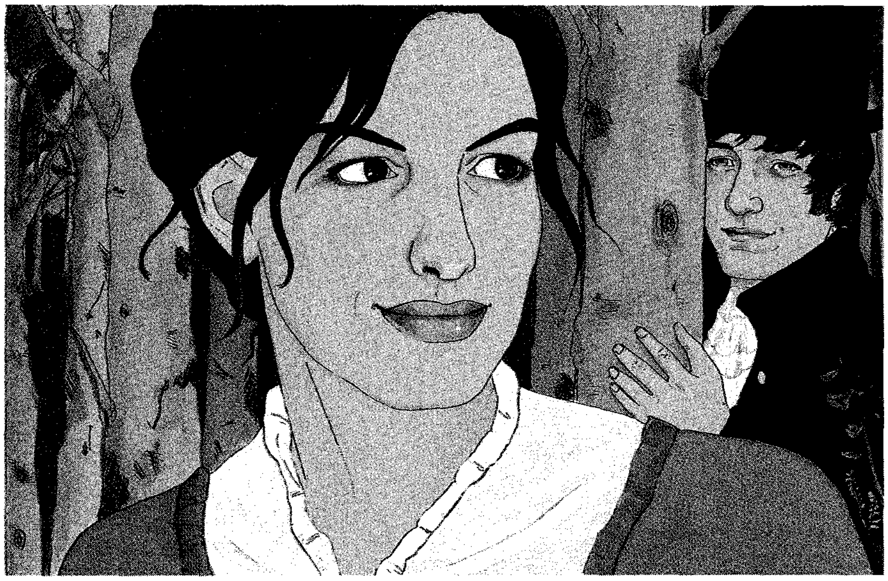
"Becoming Jane" and "2 Days in Paris."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Nobody studying the life of Jane Austen could easily confuse it with that of, say, Ernest Hemingway. Or William Burroughs. There was, in the daily round of the English novelist, a marked lack of hallucinogenic drugs, and her skills at big-game hunting were notoriously poor. "Of events her life was singularly barren," her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh wrote, adding, "Few changes and no great crisis ever broke the smooth current of its course." To the modern mind, of course, this is wholly unacceptable, and any decent literary agent would have counselled Miss Austen to devise at least a modicum of private scandal if she wanted to sell any books. Drunk driving could be tricky with a coach-and-four, and orgies can be hard to organize in a Hampshire rectory, especially in cold weather, so the makers of "Becoming Jane," a new movie about the author's formative years, have plumped for a more trusted option: the thwarted love affair.

We start in the early morning, with the hand of Jane (Anne Hathaway) filmed in closeup as it puts tentative pen to paper. Now aged around twenty, the writer-in-waiting is part of a busy household, and a glimpse of her parents, the Reverend George Austen (James Cromwell) and his wife (Julie Walters), shows just how busy they are. Unless I am much mistaken, what we observe is this learned man of God celebrating the dawn of another blessed day by going down on his good lady, who squeals with appropriate delight. The scene, though charming, entails a slight divergence from the habits of the actual Reverend Austen, whose idea of a wild time was to read aloud the poetry of William Cowper.

To be fair, the film does not flinch from recitation; everybody praises Jane when she declaims her latest piece of prose. The first hint of a more critical response comes when a gentleman, unfamiliar to Jane, bursts belatedly into one of her readings and later scorns her effort for its "juvenile self-regard." This is Thomas Lefroy (James McAvoy), a friend of her brother's, and he is, to the refined palates of the Austen circle, strong meat. We see him throwing his weight into a boxing match, with Jane, who has grown fond of her critic, both aghast at the violence and secretly willing him on.



Anne Hathaway and James McAvoy in a movie about Jane Austen.

LARA TOMLIN

That scene is groundless supposition, but there was a real Tom Lefroy, of an old Irish Protestant family. Jane mentions him two or three times in letters to her sister Cassandra (Anna Maxwell Martin), at the start of 1796: "I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together." We are not exactly in Patrick Swayze territory here, and, as always with Jane Austen, every attempt to pin her down as passionate is met (though never quite defeated) by a casual parry of wit. The same letter finds her admitting that she likes everything about Lefroy except the color of his coat. Five days later comes this:

> I rather expect to receive an offer from my friend in the course of the evening. I shall refuse him, however, unless he promises to give away his white Coat.

What is that? A declaration of love, or an unpicking of love's pretensions? When the two young people go their separate ways, as they do a short while later, does that mean the fadeout of a flirtation or a tragedy of unmendable loss? For the director of "Becoming Jane," Julian Jarrold, and his screenwriters, Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams, there is no contest: the whole film, though dotted with passable jokes and packed—this being period drama—with long-gowned maidens hoofing about the dance floor, builds up to a climactic grief, with the middle-aged Lefroy encountering Austen and letting her know, through the moistness of his eyes and the graying of his whiskers, that he mourns What Might Have Been.

For any Austen reader, this sadness will be hard to share. Lefroy rose to become Chief Justice of Ireland, and the idea that Jane might have married him, and spent her days organizing soirées for the legal profession instead of sitting peacefully at home writing about Emma Woodhouse, is dreadful to contemplate. This film, however, is not directed at Austen readers. It is directed at moviegoers who, having feasted on large-screen adaptations of her major novels, will not be fobbed off with pedantic protestations that there are no more to adapt. The solution is simple: with the fiction exhausted, why not turn to the life of the fictioneer, and treat it as if it were a book in the first place?

Once you admit that the Jane Austen depicted onscreen bears scant relation to any person named Jane Austen, living or dead, the film fulfills its purpose. I had never before considered her as a cricketer, for instance, and I am fairly sure that she never sought to elope, but I enjoyed both inventions—the one bucolic and triumphant, the other sodden and frustrated, and presumably meant as a precursor to Lydia's running away with Wickham in "Pride and Prejudice." Mind you, anyone as ripe and seductive as Anne Hathaway would have found herself eloping on a weekly basis, and one could argue that other, more contemporary, performances of hers—as the hapless novice in "The Devil Wears Prada," or even as Jake Gyllenhaal's wife in "Brokeback Mountain," losing all eagerness as she realizes that she will never be loved by her mate, yet still putting on a polished front—dug deeper into Austen's enduring concerns than any of the flummery in "Becoming Jane."

James McAvoy was last seen as the doctor in "The Last King of Scotland," and he, likewise, seemed more comfortable in modern dress; there is something puckish and pushy about him, a hardness in his charm, that sits uneasily in the days of velvet, breeches, and boots. The one actor who looks at ease in those times is Ian Richardson, who plays Judge Langlois, Lefroy's disapproving guardian. The fact that such a fine Shakespearean was best known in America for his Grey Poupon commercials is a matter of infinite regret; we are left with the memory of his dapper and devious Bill Haydon, in "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy," and now with his heavy-wigged cameo in "Becoming Jane," the last film he completed before his death. "The ironical little authoress" is the Judge's verdict on Jane Austen. Behind his condescension there is fear, and behind the fear a twinge of recognition: he knows, looking down at the authoress, that he and all the clever gentlemen of England have finally met their match.

It would be wrong to call "2 Days in Paris" a vanity project. It is written and directed by Julie Delpy. It stars Julie Delpy. The parents of Marion, the character played by Julie Delpy, are played by Marie Pillet and Albert Delpy, the parents of Julie Delpy. The original music is by Julie Delpy. "Lalalala," the song that accompanies the closing credits, is performed by Julie Delpy. Yet, as I say, this is not a vanity project. It is an insanity project.

I refer not to Delpy's own mental state, which may be a miracle of equipoise, but to the air that she projects onscreen, thrumming as it does with the threat of delirious surprise. At one point, Marion goes out to lunch with her American boyfriend, Jack (Adam Goldberg), and notices, at the adjoining table, one of her innumerable exes. The spat that ensues is so vehement that she is expelled from the restaurant, with Jack following numbly in her wake. She has brought him to Paris, en route from a vacation in Venice, before they head back to their shared life in New York, and only now, as he views his beloved in her natural habitat, does Jack understand that he may as well be going out with Robespierre.

Delpy herself is a bilateral soul, having acted in "Before Sunrise" and "Before Sunset" (she earned an Oscar nomination for co-writing the latter), and, though she remains every inch the wafting Parisian sprite, the United States has edged into the corner of her vision. Perhaps unconsciously, her performance here is a riff on the Diane Keaton who sailed through early Woody Allen—watch her in the opening scene, with frizzy hair and spectacles, and, beside her, Adam Goldberg firing off anti-Republican gags and looking just like Tony Roberts in "Annie Hall," with added tattoos. Anyone hoping that "2 Days in Paris" will revisit such peppy romance, however, will be frustrated. There is an extra rawness here, a determination to confront and annoy, starting with the skinned rabbit, complete with staring eyeball, that Marion's father prepares for lunch. Then, there are the city's taxi-drivers, every one of them a racist or a faux Lothario. When our lovers take the subway, a man stands close and gazes at them, as if he were a lover, too. Though Delpy gets a laugh out of this, her camera is forever doing something similar, getting in Jack's face and checking his reactions, and nobody comes out of the movie well: Jack seems plaintive and marooned, while Marion and her family are like leftover rebels, whose only cause is bickering among themselves. Even their cat, the aptly named Jean-Luc, is a bundle of pure fury. Still, honesty has its upside; when Jack visits Père-Lachaise cemetery to see the grave of Jim Morrison, he admits to not liking the Doors. Instead, he explains, "I'm a huge Val Kilmer fan." An American in Paris, and proud of it. ♦

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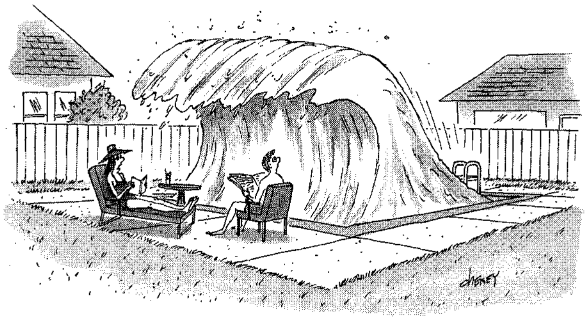
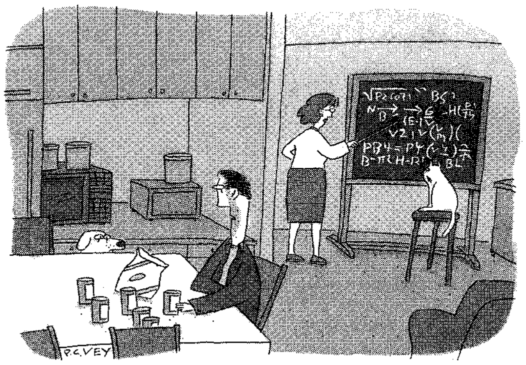


"I told you this house was too close to the moon."
Laura Hipp, Jackson, Miss.



THE FINALISTS

"Trust me, my lessons have way more real-world applications."
Oren Uziel, Brooklyn, N.Y.

"You want to impress me? Drive to the store and get me more beer."
Ken Hoffman, Los Gatos, Calif.

"Don't worry—they'll never actually build it."
Warren Dennis, Santa Barbara, Calif.

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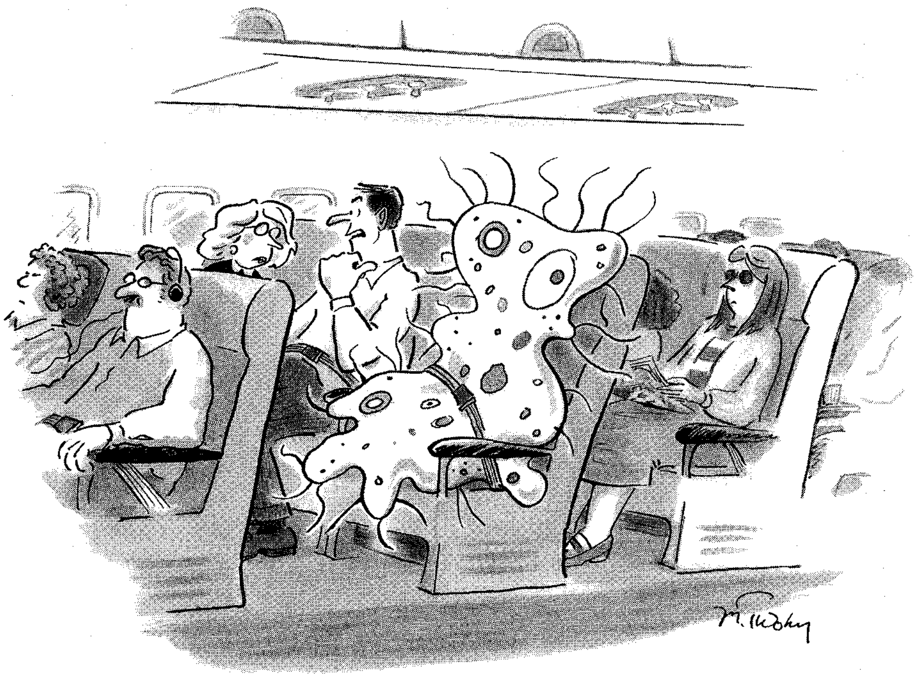

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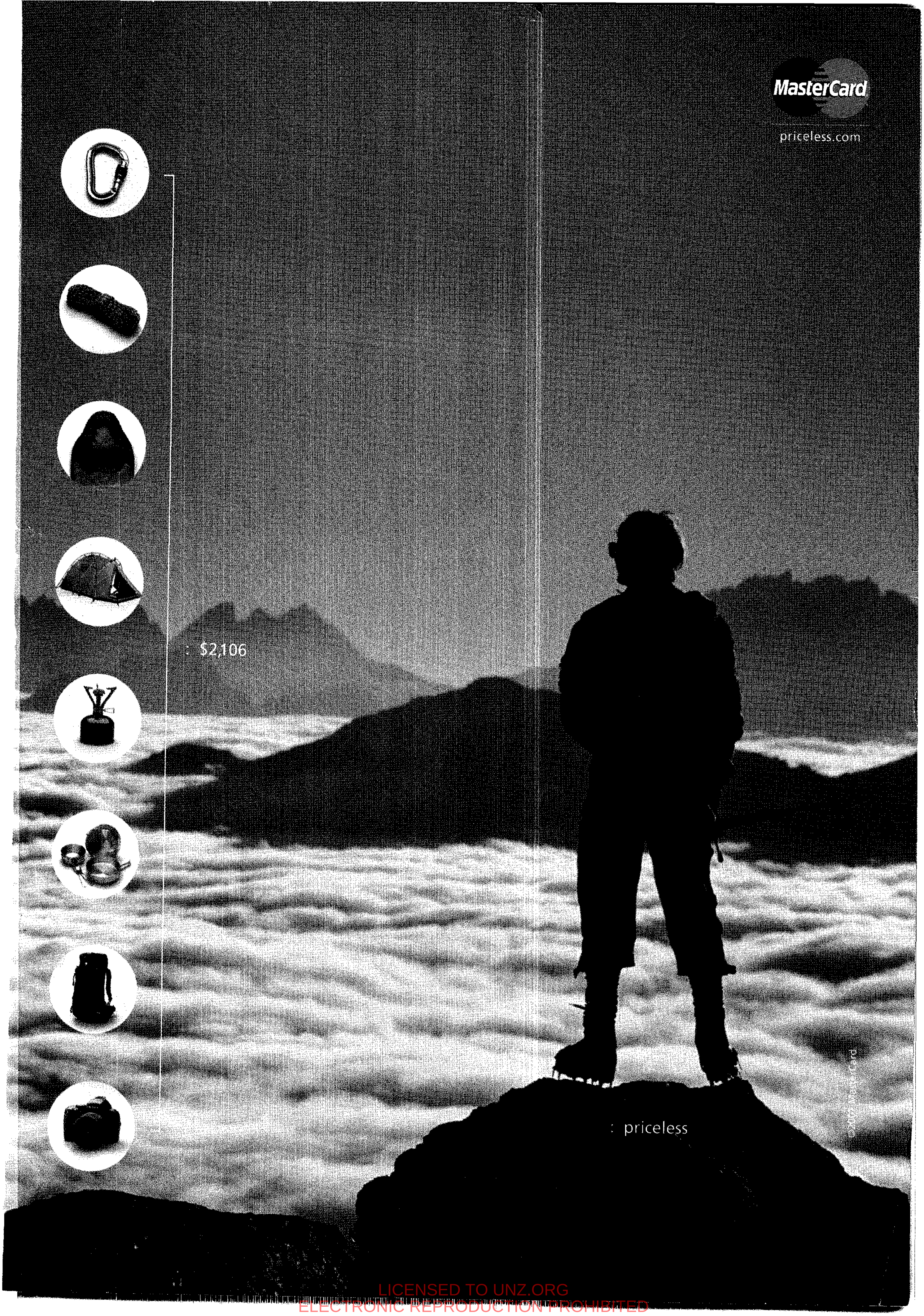
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